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31 STORIES

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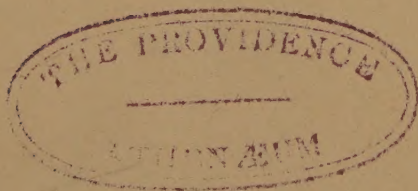
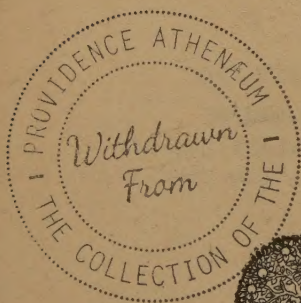
THIRTY AND ONE AUTHORS

EDITED BY

ERNEST RHYS

AND

C. A. DAWSON SCOTT



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DEDICATED TO
PERCY HORD
WHO FIRST SUGGESTED
THIS SHORT STORY BOOK

FOREWORD

A WORD is due from the editors of this book to introduce it to the reader. Their idea was to collect a number of short stories which should illustrate the art in all its modern variety and its contrasted colours. As the book shows, there are many different fashions of tale-telling, and the change from the older to the younger writers is significant and clearly to be traced. H. G. Wells' mode of telling a story is not that of Arnold Bennett, of Zangwill, Galsworthy or E. Æ. Somerville; the art of Jacobs or Quiller Couch is not that of Ernest Bramah and F. Tennyson Jesse, and so with many other writers who might be named. But as they went on the editors found it impossible to get into a single volume the stories they had collected. The present book contains only one group of the many that might be arranged on the same lines. Others remain to provide material for a second and possibly a third series. The short story indeed is bound to gain in vogue as time goes on, for its swift and decisive art is well suited to the temper (and the brief leisure) of our crowded days; and it deserves a more permanent setting than that of the magazines and newspapers, which have been all along, as we do not forget, its great encouragers.

E. R.

C, A, D. S.

CONTENTS

A STRANGE THING	John Galsworthy	PAGE I
<i>Copyright, 1920, by Chas. Scribner's Sons</i>		
THE DOOR IN THE WALL	H. G. Wells	II
<i>Copyright, 1911, by Mitchell Kennerly</i>		
THE PRICE OF THE HEAD	John Russell	31
<i>Copyright, 1919, by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.</i>		
THE FORTUNE TELLER	Arnold Bennett	45
<i>Copyright, 1912, by Geo. H. Doran Company</i>		
THE COLLECTOR	May Sinclair	59
<i>Copyright, 1914, by the Century Company</i>		
IN A CITY THAT IS NOW PLOUGHED FIELDS	Rebecca West	77
THE SABBATH BREAKER	Israel Zangwill	86
<i>Copyright, 1899, by the Macmillan Company</i>		
THE BLUE BEADS	Mary E. Mann	92
FEAR	Catherine Wells	105
THE STORY OF CHANG TAO	Ernest Bramah	110
<i>Copyright, 1923, by Geo. H. Doran Company</i>		
"THE WHITEBOYS"	E. C. Somerville and Martin Ross	136
<i>Copyright, 1908, by Longmans Green & Company</i>		

CONTENTS

PAGE

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT,

HIGHWAYMAN A. T. Quiller Couch 151

DESTINY AND A DOG Grace Rhys 165

THE MAN IN THE ROOM H. D. Lowry 175

THE TURRET ROOM E. Colburn Mayne 182

THE PICTURES Jane Findlater 204

FINE FEATHERS W. W. Jacobs 227

Copyright, 1911, by Chas. Scribner's Sons

Copyright, 1909, 1910, 1911, by W. W. Jacobs

MY HONOURED MASTER C. A. Dawson Scott 240

CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN A. E. Coppard 248

Copyright, 1922, by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

MEKTUB R. B. Cunninghame Graham 254

THE FLOWER George R. Malloch 261

THE MARE WITHOUT A NAME Ernest Rhys 270

WHY SENATH MARRIED F. Tennyson Jesse 275

THE CONNOISSEUR Perceval Gibbon 293

THE DRAWN ARROW Clemence Housman 314

THE LAST LAP E. M. Goodman 327

CONTENTS

	PAGE
OUT THERE E. Grant Watson	332
HIS WIDOWS Violet Hunt	351
BLESSED ARE THE MEEK Mary Webb	364
THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE . . . Stacy Aumonier	373
<i>Copyright, 1921, by the Macmillan Company</i>	
THE INVISIBLE MAN G. K. Chesterton	394
<i>Copyright, 1911, by the John Lane Company</i>	

A STRANGE THING

By JOHN GALSWORTHY

NOT very long ago, during a sojourn in a part of the West Country never yet visited by me, I went out one fine but rather cold March morning for a long ramble. I was in one of those disillusioned moods which comes to writers bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of confidence, a prey to that recurrent despair, the struggle with which makes the profession of the pen—as a friend once said to me—“a manly one.” “Yes,” I was thinking, for all that the air was so brisk, and the sun so bright, “nothing comes to me nowadays, no flashes of light, none of those suddenly shaped visions that bring cheer and warmth to a poor devil’s heart, and set his brain and pen to driving on. A bad, bad business!” And my eyes, wandering over the dip and rise, the woods, the moor, the rocks of that fine countryside, took in the loveliness thereof with the profound discontent of one who, seeing beauty, feels that he cannot render it. The high lane-banks had just been pollarded, one could see right down over the fields and gorse and bare woods tinged with that rosy brown of beech and birch twigs, and the dusty saffron of the larches. And suddenly my glance was arrested by something vivid, a sort of black and white excitement in the air. “Aha!” I thought. “A magpie. Two! Three! Good! Is it an omen?” The birds had risen at the bottom of a field, their twining, fluttering voyage—most decorative of all bird flights—was soon lost in the wood beyond, but something it had left behind—in my heart; I felt more

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THIRTY-ONE STORIES

hopeful, less inclined to think about the failure of my spirit, better able to give myself up to this new country I was passing through. Over the next rise in the very winding lane I heard the sound of brisk church bells, and not three hundred yards beyond came to a village green, where knots of men dressed in the dark clothes, light ties and bowler hats of village festivity, and of women smartened up beyond belief, were gathered, chattering, round the yard of an old, grey, square-towered church.

"What's going on?" I thought. "It's not Sunday, not the birthday of a potentate, and surely they don't keep saint days in this manner. It must be a wedding. Yes—there's a favour! Let's go in and see!" And, passing the expectant groups, I entered the church and made my way up the aisle. There was already a fair sprinkling of folk all turned round towards the door, and the usual licensed buzz and whisper of a wedding congregation. The church, as seems usual in remote parishes, had been built all those centuries ago to hold a population in accordance with the expectations of its tenet, "Be fruitful and multiply." But the whole population could have been seated in a quarter of its space. It was lofty and unwarmed save by excitement and the smell of bear's grease. There was certainly more animation than I had ever seen or savoured in a truly rural district.

The bells, which had been ringing with a sort of languid joviality, fell now into the hurried crashing which marks the approach of a bride, and the people I had passed outside came thronging in. I perceived a young man—little more than a boy—who by his semi-detachment, the fumbling of his gloved hands, and the sheepishness of the smile on his good-looking, open face, was obviously the bridegroom. I liked the looks of him—a cut above the usual village bumpkin—something free and kind about his face. But no one was paying him the least attention. It was for the bride they were waiting; and I myself began to be excited. What

A STRANGE THING

would this young thing be like? Just the ordinary village maiden with tight cheeks and dress, coarse veil, high colour, and eyes like a rabbit's; or something—something like that little Welsh girl on the hills whom I once passed and whose peer I have never since seen? Bending forward, I accosted an apple-faced woman in the next pew. "Can you tell me who the bride is?"

Regarding me with the grey, round defensive glance that one bestows on strangers, she replied:

"Aw, don't 'ee know? 'Tes Gwenny Mara—prettiest, brightest maid in these parts." And jerking her thumb towards the neglected bridegroom, she added: "He's a lucky young chap. She'm a sunny maid, for sure, and a gude maid, tu."

Somehow the description did not reassure me, and I prepared for the worst.

A bubble, a stir, a rustle!

Like every one else, I turned frankly round. She was coming up the aisle on the arm of a hard-faced, rather gipsy-looking man dressed in a farmer's very best.

I can only tell you that to see her coming down the centre of that grey church amongst all those dark-clothed people was like watching the dance of a sunbeam. Never had I seen a face so happy, sweet, and radiant. Smiling, eager, just lost enough to her surroundings, her hair unconquerably golden through the coarse veil; her dancing eyes clear and dark as a peat pool—she was the prettiest sight. One could only think of a young apple tree with the spring sun on its blossom. She had that kind of infectious brightness which comes from very simple goodness. It was quite a relief to have taken a fancy to the young man's face and to feel that she was passing into good hands.

The only flowers in the church were early daffodils, but those first children of the sun were somehow extraordinarily appropriate to the wedding of this girl. When she came out

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

she was pelted with them, and with that miserable confetti, without which not even the simplest souls can pass to bliss, it seems. There are things in life which make one feel good—sunshine, most music, all flowers, many children, some animals, clouds, mountains, bird-songs, blue sky, dancing, and here and there a young girl's face. And I had the feeling that all of us there felt good for the mere seeing of her.

When she had driven away, I found myself beside a lame old man with whiskers and delightful eyes, who continued to smile after the carriage had quite vanished. Noticing, perhaps, that I, too, was smiling, he said: "'Tis a funny thing, tu, when a maid like that gets married—makes you go all of a tremble—so it du." And to my nod he added: "Brave bit o' sunshine—we'll miss her hereabout; not a doubt of it. We ain't got another one like that."

"Was that her father?" I asked, for the want of something to say. With a sharpish look at my face, he shook his head.

"No, she an't got no parents, Mr. Mara bein' her uncle, as you may say. No, she an't got no parents," he repeated, and there was something ill at ease, yet juicy, about his voice, as though he knew things that he would not tell.

Since there was nothing more to wait for, I went up to the little inn and ordered bread and cheese. The male congregation was wetting its whistle noisily within, but, as a stranger, I had the verandah to myself, and, finishing my simple lunch in the March sunlight, I paid and started on. Taking at random one of the three lanes which debouched from the bottom of the green, I meandered on between high banks, happy in the consciousness of not knowing at all where it would lead me—that essential of a country ramble. Except one cottage in a bottom and one farm on a rise, I passed nothing, nobody. The spring was late in these parts, the buds had hardly formed as yet on any trees, and now and then between the bursts of sunlight a few fine specks of

A STRANGE THING

snow would come drifting past me on the wind. Close to a group of pines at a high corner the lane dipped sharply down to a long farmhouse standing back in its yard, where three carts were drawn up and an empty waggonette with its shafts in the air. And suddenly, by some broken daffodils on the seats and confetti on the ground, I perceived that I had stumbled on the bride's home, where the wedding feast was, no doubt, in progress.

Gratifying but by no means satisfying my curiosity by gazing at the lichened stone and thatch of the old house, at the pigeons, pigs, and hens at large between it and the barns, I passed on down the lane, which turned up steeply to the right beside a little stream. To my left was a long larch wood, to my right rough fields with many trees. The lane finished at a gate below the steep moor-side crowned by a rocky tor. I stood there leaning on the top bar, debating whether I should ascend or no. The bracken had, most of it, been cut in the autumn, and not a hundred yards away the furze was being swaled; the little blood-red flames and the blue smoke, the yellow blossoms of the gorse, the sunlight, and some flecks of drifting snow were mingled in an amazing tangle of colour.

I had made up my mind to ascend the tor and was pushing through the gate, when suddenly I saw a woman sitting on a stone under the wall bordering the larch wood. She was holding her head in her hands, rocking her body to and fro, and her eyes were evidently shut, for she had not noticed me. She wore a blue serge dress, her hat reposed beside her, and her dark hair was straggling about her face. That face, all blowsy and flushed, was at once wild and stupefied. A face which has been beautiful, coarsened and swollen by life and strong emotion, is a pitiful enough sight. Her dress, hat, and the way her hair had been done were redolent of the town, and of that unnameable something which clings to women whose business it is to attract men. And yet there

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

was a gipsyish look about her, as though she had not always been of the town.

The sight of a woman's unrestrained distress in the very heart of untouched nature is so rare that one must be peculiar to remain unmoved. And there I stood, not knowing what on earth to do. She went on rocking herself to and fro, her stays creaking, and a faint moaning sound coming from her lips; and suddenly she drooped over her lap, her hands fallen to her sides, as though she had gone into a kind of coma. How go on and leave her thus? Yet how intrude on what did not seem to me mere physical suffering?

In that quandary I stood and watched. This corner was quite sheltered from the wind, the sun almost hot, and the breath of the swaling reached one in the momentary calms. For three full minutes she had not moved a finger, till, beginning to think she had really fainted, I went up to her. From her drooped body came a scent of heat and of stale violet powder, and I could see, though the east wind had outraddled them, traces of rouge on her cheeks; their surface had a sort of swollen defiance, but underneath, as it were, a wasted look. Her breathing sounded faint and broken.

Mustering courage, I touched her on the arm. She raised her head and looked up. Her eyes were the best things she had left; they must have once been very beautiful. Blood-shot now from the wind, their wild, stupefied look passed after a moment into the peculiar, half-bold, half-furtive stare of women of a certain sort. She did not speak, and in my embarrassment I drew out the flask of port I always take with me on my rambles, and stammered:

"I beg your pardon—are you feeling faint? Would you care——?" And, unscrewing the top, I held out the flask. She stared at it a moment blankly, then taking it, said:

"That's kind of you. I feel to want it, tu." And putting it to her lips, she drank, tilting back her head. Perhaps it was the tell-tale softness of her u's, perhaps the naturally

A STRANGE THING

strong lines of her figure thus bent back, but somehow the plumage of the town bird seemed to drop off her suddenly.

She handed back the flask, as empty as it had ever been, and said, with a hard smile:

"I daresay you thought me funny sittin' 'ere like that."

"I thought you were ill."

She laughed without the faintest mirth, and muttered:

"I did go on, didn't I?" Then, almost fiercely, added: "I got some reason, too. Seein' the old place again after all these years." Her dark eyes, which the wine seemed to have cleared and boldened, swept me up and down, taking me in, making sure, perhaps, whether or no she had ever seen me, and what sort of a brute I might be. Then she said: "I was born here. Are you from these parts?" I shook my head—"No, from the other side of the county."

She laughed. Then, after a moment's silence, said abruptly:

"I been to a weddin'—first I've seen since I was a girl."

Some instinct kept me silent.

"My own daughter's weddin', but nobody didn't know me—not likely."

I had dropped down under the shelter of the wall on to a stone opposite, and at those words looked at her with interest indeed. She—this coarsened, wasted, suspiciously-scented woman of the town—the mother of that sweet, sunny child I had just seen married? And again instinctively silent about my own presence at the wedding, I murmured:

"I thought I saw some confetti in that farmyard as I came up the lane."

She laughed again.

"Confetti—that's the little pink and white and blue things—plenty o' that"; and she added fiercely: "My own brother didn't know me—let alone my girl. How should she?—I haven't seen her since she was a baby—she was a laughin' little thing"; and she gazed past me with that look in the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

eyes as of people who are staring back into the bygone. "I guess we was laughin' when we got her. 'Twas just here—summer-time. I 'ad the moon in my blood that night, right enough." Then, turning her eyes on my face, she added: "That's what a girl *will* 'ave, you know, once in a while, and like as not it'll du for her. Only thirty-five now, I am, an pretty nigh the end o' my tether. What can you expect?—I'm a gay woman. Did for me right enough. Her father's dead, tu."

"Do you mean," I said, "because of your child?"

She nodded. "I suppose you can say that. They made me bring an order against him. He wouldn't pay up, so he went and enlisted, an' in tu years 'e was dead in the Boer War—so it killed him right enough. But there she is, a sweet sprig if ever there was one. That's a strange thing, isn't it?" And she stared straight before her in a sudden silence. Nor could I find anything to say, slowly taking in the strangeness of this thing. That girl, so like a sunbeam, of whom the people talked as though she were a blessing in their lives—her coming into life to have been the ruin of the two who gave her being!

The woman went on dully: "Funny how I knew she was goin' to be married—'twas a farmer told me—comes to me regular when he goes to Exeter market. I always knew he came from near my old home. 'There's a weddin' on Tuesday,' 'e says, 'I'd like to be the bridegroom at. Prettiest, sunniest maid you ever saw'; an' he told me where she come from, so I knew. He found me a bit funny that afternoon. But he don't know who I am, though he used to go to school with me; I'd never tell, not for worlds." She shook her head vehemently. "I don't know why I told you; I'm not meself to-day, and that's a fact." At her half-suspicious, half-appealing look, I said quickly:

"I don't know a soul about here. It's all right."

She sighed. "It was kind of you; and I feel to want to

A STRANGE THING

talk sometimes. Well, after he was gone, I said to myself: 'I'll take a holiday and go an' see my daughter married.' " She laughed—"I never had no pink and white and blue little things myself. That was all done up for me that night I had the moon in me blood. Ah! my father was a proper hard man. 'Twas bad enough before I had my baby; but after, when I couldn't get the father to marry me, an' he cut an' run, proper life they led me, him and stepmother. Cry! Didn' I cry—I was a soft-hearted thing—never went to sleep with me eyes dry—never. 'Tis a cruel thing to make a young girl cry."

I said quietly: "Did you run away, then?"

She nodded. "Bravest thing I ever did. Nearly broke my 'eart to leave my baby; but 'twas that or drownin' myself. I was soft then. I went off with a young fellow—book-maker that used to come over to the sports meetin', wild about me—but he never married me"—again she uttered her hard laugh—"knew a thing worth tu o' that." Lifting her hand towards the burning furze, she added: "I used to come up here an' help 'em light that when I was a little girl." And suddenly she began to cry. It was not so painful and alarming as her first distress, for it seemed natural now.

At the side of the cart-track by the gate was an old boot thrown away, and it served me for something to keep my eyes engaged. The dilapidated black object among the stones and wild plants on that day of strange mixed beauty was as incongruous as this unhappy woman herself revisiting her youth. And there shot into my mind a vision of this spot as it might have been that summer night when she had "the moon in her blood"—queer phrase—and those two young creatures in the tall soft fern, in the warmth and the darkened loneliness, had yielded to the impulse in their blood. A brisk fluttering of snowflakes began falling from the sky still blue, drifting away over our heads towards the blood-red flames and smoke. They powdered the woman's

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

hair and shoulders, and with a sob and a laugh she held up her hand, and began catching them as a child might.

"'Tis a funny day for my girl's weddin'," she said. Then with a sort of fierceness added: "She'll never know her mother—she's in luck there, tu!" And, grabbing her feathered hat from the ground, she got up. "I must be gettin' back for my train, else I'll be late for an appointment."

When she had put her hat on, rubbed her face, dusted and smoothed her dress, she stood looking at the burning furze. Restored to her town plumage, to her wonted bravado, she was more than ever like that old discarded boot, incongruous.

"I'm a fool ever to have come," she said; "only upset me—and you don't want no more upsettin' than you get, that's certain. Good-bye, and thank you for the drink—it lusened my tongue praaper, didn't it?" She gave me a look—not as a professional—but a human, puzzled look. "I told you my baby was a laughin' little thing. I'm glad she's still like that. I'm glad I've seen her." Her lips quivered for a second; then, with a faked jauntiness, she nodded. "So long!" and passed through the gate down into the lane.

I sat there in the snow and sunlight some minutes after she was gone. Then, getting up, I went and stood by the burning furze. The blowing flames and the blue smoke were alive and beautiful; but behind them they were leaving blackened skeleton twigs.

"Yes," I thought, "but in a week or two the little green grass-shoots will be pushing up underneath into the sun. So the world goes! Out of destruction! It's a strange thing!"

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

By H. G. WELLS

I

ONE confidential evening, not three months ago, Lionel Wallace told me this story of the Door in the Wall. And at the time I thought that so far as he was concerned it was a true story.

He told it me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere, and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focussed, shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and me, and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from everyday realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. "He was mystifying!" I said, and then: "How well he did it! . . . It isn't quite the thing I should have expected him, of all people, to do well."

Afterwards as I sat up in bed and sipped my morning tea, I found myself trying to account for the flavour of reality that perplexed me in his impossible reminiscences, by supposing they did in some way suggest, present, convey—I hardly know which word to use—experiences it was otherwise impossible to tell.

Well, I don't resort to that explanation now. I have got

From *The Hole in the Wall*, by H. G. Wells, copyright, 1911, by Mitchell Kennedy.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

over my intervening doubts. I believe now, as I believed at the moment of telling, that Wallace did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret for me. But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess. Even the facts of his death, which ended my doubts for ever, throw no light on that.

That much the reader must judge for himself.

I forget now what chance comment or criticism of mine moved so reticent a man to confide in me. He was, I think, defending himself against an imputation of slackness and unreliability I had made in relation to a great public movement, in which he had disappointed me. But he plunged suddenly. "I have," he said, "a preoccupation——

"I know," he went on, after a pause, "I have been negligent. The fact is—it isn't a case of ghosts or apparitions—but—it's an odd thing to tell of, Redmond—I am haunted. I am haunted by something—that rather takes the light out of things, that fills me with longings. . . ."

He paused, checked by that English shyness that so often overcomes us when we would speak of moving or grave or beautiful things. "You were at Saint Æthelstan's all through," he said, and for a moment that seemed to me quite irrelevant. "Well"—and he paused. Then very haltingly at first, but afterwards more easily, he began to tell of the thing that was hidden in his life, the haunting memory of a beauty and a happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem dull and tedious and vain to him.

Now that I have the clue to it, the thing seems written visibly in his face. I have a photograph in which that look of detachment has been caught and intensified. It reminds me of what a woman once said of him—a woman who had loved him greatly. "Suddenly," she said, "the interest goes

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

out of him. He forgets you. He doesn't care a rap for you—under his very nose. . . .”

Yet the interest was not always out of him, and when he was holding his attention to a thing Wallace could contrive to be an extremely successful man. His career, indeed, is set with successes. He left me behind him long ago: he soared up over my head, and cut a figure in the world that I couldn't cut—anyhow. He was still a year short of forty, and they say now that he would have been in office and very probably in the new Cabinet if he had lived. At school he always beat me without effort—as it were by nature. We were at school together at Saint Æthelstan's College in West Kensington for almost all our school-time. He came into the school as my co-equal, but he left far above me, in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance. Yet I think I made a fair average running. And it was at school I heard first of the “Door in the Wall”—that I was to hear of a second time only a month before his death.

To him at least the Door in the Wall was a real door, leading through a real wall to immortal realities. Of that I am now quite assured.

And it came into his life quite early, when he was a little fellow between five and six. I remember how, as he sat making his confession to me with a slow gravity, he reasoned and reckoned the date of it. “There was,” he said, “a crimson Virginia creeper in it—all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow, though I don't clearly remember how, and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen. I take it that means October. I look out for horse-chestnut leaves every year and I ought to know.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"If I'm right in that, I was about five years and four months old."

He was, he said, rather a precocious little boy—he learnt to talk at an abnormally early age, and he was so sane and "old-fashioned," as people say, that he was permitted an amount of initiative that most children scarcely attain by seven and eight. His mother died when he was two, and he was under the less vigilant and authoritative care of a nursery governess. His father was a stern, preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention, and expected great things of him. For all his brightness he found life a little grey and dull, I think. And one day he wandered.

He could not recall the particular neglect that enabled him to get away, nor the course he took among the West Kensington roads. All that had faded among the incurable blurs of memory. But the white wall and the green door stood out quite distinctly.

As his memory of that childish experience ran, he did at the very first sight of that door experience a peculiar emotion, an attraction, a desire to get to the door and open it and walk in. And at the same time he had the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him—he could not tell which—to yield to this attraction. He insisted upon it as a curious thing that he knew from the very beginning—unless memory had played him the queerest trick—that the door was unfastened, and that he could go in if he chose.

I seem to see the figure of that little boy, drawn and repelled. And it was very clear in his mind, too, though why it should be so was never explained, that his father would be very angry if he went in through that door.

Wallace described all these moments of hesitation to me with the utmost particularity. He went right past the door, and then, with his hands in his pockets and making an infantile attempt to whistle, strolled right along beyond the end

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

of the wall. There he recalls a number of mean dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead, ball taps, pattern books of wall paper, and tins of enamel. He stood pretending to examine these things, and *coveting*, passionately desiring, the green door.

Then, he said, he had a gust of emotion. He made a run for it, lest hesitation should grip him again; he went plump with outstretched hand through the green door and let it slam behind him. And so, in a trice, he came into the garden that has haunted all his life.

It was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came.

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well-being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad—as only in rare moments, and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there. . . .

Wallace mused before he went on telling me. "You see," he said, with the doubtful inflection of a man who pauses at incredible things, "there were two great panthers there. . . . Yes, spotted panthers. And I was not afraid. There was a long wide path with marble-edged flower borders on either side, and these two huge velvety beasts were playing there with a ball. One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out, and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide, this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"You know, in the very moment the door swung to behind me, I forgot the road with its fallen chestnut leaves, its cabs and tradesmen's carts, I forgot the sort of gravitational pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life. I became in a moment a very glad and wonder-happy little boy—in another world. It was a world with a different quality, a warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky. And before me ran this long wide path, invitingly, with weedless beds on either side, rich with untended flowers, and these two great panthers. I put my little hands fearlessly on their soft fur, and caressed their round ears and the sensitive corners under their ears, and played with them, and it was as though they welcomed me home. There was a keen sense of home-coming in my mind, and when presently a tall, fair girl appeared in the pathway and came to meet me, smiling, and said, "Well?" to me, and lifted me, and kissed me, and put me down, and led me by the hand, there was no amazement, but only an impression of delightful rightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked. There were broad red steps, I remember, that came into view between spikes of delphinium, and up these we went to a great avenue between very old and shady dark trees. All down this avenue, you know, between the red chapped stems, were marble seats of honour, and statuary, and very tame and friendly white doves. . . .

"Along this cool avenue my girl-friend led me, looking down—I recall the pleasant lines, the finely-modelled chin of her sweet, kind face—asking me questions in a soft, agreeable voice, and telling me things, pleasant things I know, though what they were I was never able to recall. . . . Presently a little Capuchin monkey, very clean, with a fur of ruddy brown and kindly hazel eyes, came down a tree to

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

us and ran beside me, looking up at me and grinning, and presently leapt to my shoulder. So we two went on our way in great happiness."

He paused.

"Go on," I said.

"I remember little things. We passed an old man musing among laurels, I remember, and a place gay with paroquets, and came through a broad, shaded colonnade to a spacious cool palace, full of pleasant fountains, full of beautiful things, full of the quality and promise of heart's desire. And there were many things and many people, some that still seem to stand out clearly and some that are a little vague; but all these people were beautiful and kind. In some way—I don't know how—it was conveyed to me that they all were kind to me, glad to have me there, and filling me with gladness by their gestures, by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love in their eyes. Yes——"

He mused for a while. "Playmates I found there. That was very much to me, because I was a lonely little boy. They played delightful games in a grass-covered court where there was a sun-dial set about with flowers. And as one played one loved. . . .

"But—it's odd—there's a gap in my memory. I don't remember the games we played. I never remembered. Afterwards, as a child, I spent long hours trying, even with tears, to recall the form of that happiness. I wanted to play it all over again—in my nursery—by myself. No! All I remember is the happiness and two dear playfellows who were most with me. . . . Then presently came a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a sombre woman, wearing a soft long robe of pale purple, who carried a book, and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall—though my playmates were loth to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was carried away. "Come back to us!" they cried. "Come back

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

to us soon!" I looked up at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave. She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee. The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born. . . .

"It was wonderful to me, because the pages of that book were not pictures, you understand, but realities."

Wallace paused gravely—looked at me doubtfully.

"Go on," I said. "I understand."

"They were realities—yes, they must have been; people moved and things came and went in them; my dear mother, whom I had near forgotten; then my father, stern and upright, the servants, the nursery, all the familiar things of home. Then the front door and the busy streets, with traffic to and fro. I looked and marvelled, and looked half doubtfully again into the woman's face and turned the pages over, skipping this and that, to see more of this book and more, and so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall, and felt again the conflict and the fear.

"'And next?' I cried, and would have turned on, but the cool hand of the grave woman delayed me.

"'Next?' I insisted, and struggled gently with her hand, pulling up her fingers with all my childish strength, and as she yielded and the page came over she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow.

"But the page did not show the enchanted garden, nor the panthers, nor the girl who had led me by the hand, nor the playfellows who had been so loth to let me go. It showed a long grey street in West Kensington, in that chill hour of afternoon before the lamps are lit, and I was there, a wretched little figure, weeping aloud, for all that I could do to restrain

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

myself, and I was weeping because I could not return to my dear playfellows who had called after me, 'Come back to us! Come back to us soon!' I was there. This was no page in a book, but harsh reality; that enchanted place and the restraining hand of the grave mother at whose knee I stood had gone—whither had they gone?"

He halted again, and remained for a time staring into the fire.

"Oh! the woefulness of that return!" he murmured.

"Well?" I said, after a minute or so.

"Poor little wretch I was!—brought back to this grey world again! As I realised the fulness of what had happened to me, I gave way to quite ungovernable grief. And the shame and humiliation of that public weeping and my disgraceful home-coming remain with me still. I see again the benevolent-looking old gentleman in gold spectacles who stopped and spoke to me—prodding me first with his umbrella. 'Poor little chap,' said he; 'and are you lost then?'—and me a London boy of five and more! And he must needs bring in a kindly young policeman and make a crowd of me, and so march me home. Sobbing, conspicuous, and frightened, I came back from the enchanted garden to the steps of my father's house.

"That is as well as I can remember my vision of that garden—the garden that haunts me still. Of course I can convey nothing of that indescribable quality of translucent unreality, that *difference* from the common things of experience that hung about it all; but that—that is what happened. If it was a dream, I am sure it was a day-time and altogether extraordinary dream. . . . H'm!—naturally there followed a terrible questioning, by my aunt, my father, the nurse, the governess—everyone. . . .

"I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Then, as I said, everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it. Even my fairytale books were taken away from me for a time—because I was too ‘imaginative.’ Eh? Yes, they did that! My father belonged to the old school. . . . And my story was driven back upon myself. I whispered it to my pillow—my pillow that was often damp and salt to my whispering lips with childish tears. And I added always to my official and less fervent prayers this one heartfelt request: ‘Please God I may dream of the garden. Oh! take me back to my garden!’ Take me back to my garden! I dreamt often of the garden. I may have added to it, I may have changed it; I do not know. . . . All this, you understand, is an attempt to reconstruct from fragmentary memories a very early experience. Between that and the other consecutive memories of my boyhood there is a gulf. A time came when it seemed impossible I should ever speak of that wonder glimpse again.”

I asked an obvious question.

“No,” he said. “I don’t remember that I ever attempted to find my way back to the garden in those early years. This seems odd to me now, but I think that very probably a closer watch was kept on my movements after this misadventure to prevent my going astray. No, it wasn’t till you knew me that I tried for the garden again. And I believe there was a period—incredible as it seems now—when I forgot the garden altogether—when I was about eight or nine it may have been. Do you remember me as a kid at Saint Æthelstan’s?”

“Rather!”

“I didn’t show any signs, did I, in those days of having a secret dream?”

2

He looked up with a sudden smile.

“Did you ever play North-West Passage with me? . . . No, of course you didn’t come my way?”

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

"It was the sort of game," he went on, "that every imaginative child plays all day. The idea was the discovery of a North-West Passage to school. The way to school was plain enough; the game consisted in finding some way that wasn't plain, starting off ten minutes early in some almost hopeless direction, and working my way round through unaccustomed streets to my goal. And one day I got entangled among some rather low-class streets on the other side of Campden Hill, and I began to think that for once the game would be against me and that I should get to school late. I tried rather desperately a street that seemed a *cul-de-sac*, and found a passage at the end. I hurried through that with renewed hope. "I shall do it yet," I said, and passed a row of frowsy little shops that were inexplicably familiar to me, and behold! there was my long white wall and the green door that led to the enchanted garden!

"The thing whacked upon me suddenly. Then, after all, that garden, that wonderful garden, wasn't a dream!"

He paused.

"I suppose my second experience with the green door marks the world of difference there is between the busy life of a schoolboy and the infinite leisure of a child. Anyhow, this second time I didn't for a moment think of going in straight away. You see——. For one thing, my mind was full of the idea of getting to school in time—set on not breaking my record for punctuality. I must surely have felt *some* little desire at least to try the door—yes. I must have felt that. . . . But I seem to remember the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to my overmastering determination to get to school. I was immensely interested by this discovery I had made, of course—I went on with my mind full of it—but I went on. It didn't check me. I ran past, tugging out my watch, found I had ten minutes still to spare, and then I was going downhill into familiar surroundings. I got to school, breathless, it is true, and wet

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

with perspiration, but in time. I can remember hanging up my coat and hat. . . . Went right by it and left it behind me. Odd, eh?"

He looked at me thoughtfully. "Of course I didn't know then that it wouldn't always be there. Schoolboys have limited imaginations. I suppose I thought it was an awfully jolly thing to have it there, to know my way back to it, but there was the school tugging at me. I expect I was a good deal distraught and inattentive that morning, recalling what I could of the beautiful strange people I should presently see again. Oddly enough I had no doubt in my mind that they would be glad to see me. . . . Yes, I must have thought of the garden that morning just as a jolly sort of place to which one might resort in the interludes of a strenuous scholastic career.

"I didn't go that day at all. The next day was a half holiday, and that may have weighed with me. Perhaps, too, my state of inattention brought down impositions upon me, and docked the margin of time necessary for the *détour*. I don't know. What I do know is that in the meantime the enchanted garden was so much upon my mind that I could not keep it to myself.

"I told. What was his name?—a ferrety-looking youngster we used to call Squiff."

"Young Hopkins," said I.

"Hopkins it was. I did not like telling him. I had a feeling that in some way it was against the rules to tell him, but I did. He was walking part of the way home with me; he was talkative, and if we had not talked about the enchanted garden we should have talked of something else, and it was intolerable to me to think about any other subject. So I blabbed.

"Well, he told my secret. The next day in the play interval I found myself surrounded by half a dozen bigger boys, half teasing, and wholly curious to hear more of the enchanted

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

garden. There was that big Fawcett—you remember him?—and Carnaby and Morley Reynolds. You weren't there by any chance? No, I think I should have remembered if you were. . . .

"A boy is a creature of odd feelings. I was, I really believe, in spite of my secret self-disgust, a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows. I remember particularly a moment of pleasure caused by the praise of Crawshaw—you remember Crawshaw major, the son of Crawshaw the composer?—who said it was the best lie he had ever heard. But at the same time there was a really painful undertow of shame at telling what I felt was indeed a sacred secret. That beast Fawcett made a joke about the girl in green——"

Wallace's voice sank with the keen memory of that shame. "I pretended not to hear," he said. "Well, then Carnaby suddenly called me a young liar, and disputed with me when I said the thing was true. I said I knew where to find the green door, could lead them all there in ten minutes. Carnaby became outrageously virtuous, and said I'd have to—and bear out my words or suffer. Did you ever have Carnaby twist your arm? Then perhaps you'll understand how it went with me. I swore my story was true. There was nobody in the school then to save a chap from Carnaby, though Crawshaw put in a word or so. Carnaby had got his game. I grew excited and red-eared, and a little frightened. I behaved altogether like a silly little chap, and the outcome of it all was that instead of starting alone for my enchanted garden, I led the way presently—cheeks flushed, ears hot, eyes smarting, and my soul one burning misery and shame—for a party of six mocking, curious, and threatening school-fellows.

"We never found the white wall and the green door. . . ."

"You mean——?"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"I mean I couldn't find it. I would have found it if I could.

"And afterwards when I could go alone I couldn't find it. I never found it. I seem now to have been always looking for it through my schoolboy days, but I never came upon it—never."

"Did the fellows—make it disagreeable?"

"Beastly. . . . Carnaby held a council over me for wanton lying. I remember how I sneaked home and upstairs to hide the marks of my blubbering. But when I cried myself to sleep at last it wasn't for Carnaby, but for the garden, for the beautiful afternoon I had hoped for, for the sweet friendly women and the waiting playfellows, and the game I had hoped to learn again, that beautiful forgotten game. . . .

"I believed firmly that if I had not told I had bad times after that—crying at night and wool-gathering by day. For two terms I slackened and had bad reports. Do you remember? Of course you would! It was *you*—your beating me in mathematics that brought me back to the grind again."

3

For a time my friend stared silently into the red heart of the fire. Then he said: "I never saw it again until I was seventeen.

"It leapt upon me for the third time—as I was driving to Paddington on my way to Oxford and a scholarship. I had just one momentary glimpse. I was leaning over the apron of my hansom smoking a cigarette, and no doubt thinking myself no end of a man of the world, and suddenly there was the door, the wall, the dear sense of unforgettable and still attainable things.

"We clattered by—I too taken by surprise to stop my cab until we were well past and round a corner. Then I had a queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will:

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

I tapped the little door in the roof of the cab and brought my arm down to pull out my watch. 'Yes, sir!' said the cabman, smartly. 'Er—well—it's nothing,' I cried. 'My mistake! We haven't much time! Go on!' And he went on. . . .

"I got my scholarship. And the night after I was told of that I sat over my fire in my little upper room, my study, in my father's house, with his praise—his rare praise—and his sound counsels ringing in my ears, and I smoked my favourite pipe—the formidable bulldog of adolescence—and thought of that door in the long white wall. 'If I had stopped,' I thought, 'I should have missed my scholarship, I should have missed Oxford—muddled all the fine career before me! I begin to see things better!' I fell musing deeply, but I did not doubt then this career of mine was a thing that merited sacrifice.

"Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world. I saw another door opening—the door of my career."

He stared again into the fire. Its red light picked out a stubborn strength in his face for just one flickering moment, and then it vanished again.

"Well," he said and sighed, "I have served that career. I have done—much work, much hard work. But I have dreamt of the enchanted garden a thousand dreams, and seen its door, or at least glimpsed its door, four times since then. Yes—four times. For a while this world was so bright and interesting, seemed so full of meaning and opportunity, that the half-effaced charm of the garden was by comparison gentle and remote. Who wants to pat panthers on the way to dinner with pretty women and distinguished men? I came down to London from Oxford, a man of bold promise that I have done something to redeem. Something—and yet there have been disappointments. . . .

"Twice I have been in love—I will not dwell on that—

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

but once, as I went to someone who, I knew, doubted whether I dared to come, I took a short cut at a venture through an unfrequented road near Earl's Court, and so happened on a white wall and a familiar green door. 'Odd!' said I to myself, 'but I thought this place was on Campden Hill. It's the place I never could find somehow—like counting Stonehenge—the place of that queer day dream of mine.' And I went by it intent upon my purpose. It had no appeal to me that afternoon.

"I had just a moment's impulse to try the door, three steps aside were needed at the most—though I was sure enough in my heart that it would open to me—and then I thought that doing so might delay me on the way to that appointment in which I thought my honour was involved. Afterwards I was sorry for my punctuality—I might at least have peeped in, I thought, and waved a hand to those panthers, but I knew enough by this time not to seek again belatedly that which is not found by seeking. Yes, that time made me very sorry. . . .

"Years of hard work after that, and never a sight of the door. It's only recently it has come back to me. With it there has come a sense as though some thin tarnish had spread itself over my world. I began to think of it as a sorrowful and bitter thing that I should never see that door again. Perhaps I was suffering a little from overwork—perhaps it was what I've heard spoken of as the feeling of forty. I don't know. But certainly the keen brightness that makes effort easy has gone out of things recently and that just at a time—with all these new political developments—when I ought to be working. Odd, isn't it? But I do begin to find life toilsome, its rewards, as I come near them, cheap. I began a little while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes—and I've seen it three times."

"The garden?"

"No—the door! And I haven't gone in!"

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

He leaned over the table to me, with an enormous sorrow in his voice as he spoke. "Thrice I have had my chance—*thrice!* If ever that door offers itself to me again, I swore, I will go in, out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities. I will go and never return. This time I will stay. . . . I swore it, and when the time came—I *didn't go*."

"Three times in one year have I passed that door and failed to enter. Three times in the last year."

"The first time was on the night of the snatch division on the Tenants' Redemption Bill, on which the Government was saved by a majority of three. You remember? No one on our side—perhaps very few on the opposite side—expected the end that night. Then the debate collapsed like eggshells. I and Hotchkiss were dining with his cousin at Brentford; we were both unpaired, and we were called up by telephone, and set off at once in his cousin's motor. We got in barely in time, and on the way we passed my wall and door—livid in the moonlight, blotched with hot yellow as the glare of our lamps lit it, but unmistakable. 'My God!' cried I. 'What?' said Hotchkiss. 'Nothing!' I answered, and the moment passed."

"'I've made a great sacrifice,' I told the whip as I got in. 'They all have,' he said, and hurried by."

"I do not see how I could have done otherwise then. And the next occasion was as I rushed to my father's bedside to bid that stern old man farewell. Then, too, the claims of life were imperative. But the third time was different; it happened a week ago. It fills me with hot remorse to recall it. I was with Gurker and Ralphs—it's no secret now, you know, that I've had my talk with Gurker. We had been dining at Frobisher's, and the talk had become intimate between us. The question of my place in the reconstructed Ministry lay always just over the boundary of the discussion. Yes—yes. That's all settled. It needn't be talked about yet,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

but there's no reason to keep a secret from you. . . . Yes—thanks! thanks! But let me tell you my story.

“Then, on that night things were very much in the air. My position was a very delicate one. I was keenly anxious to get some definite word from Gurker, but was hampered by Ralphs' presence. I was using the best power of my brain to keep that light and careless talk not too obviously directed to the point that concerned me. I had to. Ralphs' behaviour since has more than justified my caution. . . . Ralphs, I knew, would leave us beyond the Kensington High Street, and then I could surprise Gurker by a sudden frankness. One has sometimes to resort to these little devices. . . . And then it was that in the margin of my field of vision I became aware once more of the white wall, the green door before us down the road.

“We passed it talking. I passed it. I can still see the shadow of Gurker's marked profile, his opera hat tilted forward over his prominent nose, the many folds of his neck wrap going before my shadow and Ralphs' as we sauntered past.

“I passed within twenty inches of the door. ‘If I say good-night to them, and go in,’ I asked myself, ‘what will happen?’ And I was all a-tingle for that word with Gurker.

“I could not answer that question in the tangle of my other problems. ‘They will think me mad,’ I thought. ‘And suppose I vanish now!—Amazing disappearance of a prominent politician!’ That weighed with me. A thousand inconceivably petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis.”

Then he turned on me with a sorrowful smile, and, speaking slowly, “Here I am!” he said.

“Here I am!” he repeated, “and my chance has gone from me. Three times in one year the door has been offered me—the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know. And I have rejected it, Redmond, and it has gone——”

“How do you know?”

“I know. I know. I am left now to work it out, to stick to the tasks that held me so strongly when my moments came. You say I have success, this vulgar, tawdry, irksome, envied thing. I have it.” He had a walnut in his big hand. “If that was my success,” he said, and crushed it, and held it out for me to see.

“Let me tell you something, Redmond. This loss is destroying me. For two months, for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all, except the most necessary and urgent duties. My soul is full of inappeasable regrets. At nights—when it is less likely I shall be recognised—I go out. I wander. Yes. I wonder what people would think of that if they knew. A Cabinet Minister, the responsible head of that most vital of all departments, wandering alone—grieving—sometimes near audibly lamenting—for a door, for a garden!”

4

I can see now his rather pallid face, and the unfamiliar sombre fire that had come into his eyes. I see him very vividly to-night. I sit recalling his words, his tones, and last evening's *Westminster Gazette* still lies on my sofa, containing the notice of his death. At lunch to-day the club was busy with his death. We talked of nothing else.

They found his body very early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward. It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding be-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

tween two gangers, and through it he made his way. . . .

My mind is darkened with questions and riddles.

It would seem he walked all the way from the House that night—he has frequently walked home during the past Session—and so it is I figure his dark form coming along the late and empty streets, wrapped up, intent. And then did the pale electric lights near the station cheat the rough planking into a semblance of white? Did that fatal unfastened door awaken some memory?

Was there, after all, ever any green door in the wall at all?

I do not know. I have told his story as he told it to me. There are times when I believe that Wallace was no more than the victim of the coincidence between a rare but not unprecedented type of hallucination and a careless trap, but that indeed is not my profoundest belief. You may think me superstitious, if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something—I know not what—that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death.

But did he see like that?

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

By JOHN RUSSELL

THE possessions of Christopher Alexander Pellett were these: his name, which he was always careful to retain intact; a suit of ducks, no longer intact, in which he lived and slept; a continuous thirst for liquor, and a set of red whiskers. Also he had a friend. Now, no man can gain friendship, even among the gentle islands of Polynesia, except by virtue of some quality attaching to him. Strength, humour, villainy: he must show some trait by which the friend can catch and hold. How, then, explain the loving devotion lavished upon Christopher Alexander Pellett by Karaki, the company boat boy? This was the mystery at Fufuti.

There was no harm in Pellett. He never quarrelled. He never raised his fist. Apparently he had never learned that a white man's foot, though it wobble ever so, is given him wherewith to kick natives out of the road. He never even cursed anyone except himself and the Chinese half-caste who sold him brandy: which was certainly allowable because the brandy was very bad.

On the other hand, there was no perceptible good in him. He had long lost the will to toil, and latterly even the skill to beg. He did not smile, or dance or exhibit any of the amiable eccentricities that sometimes recommend the drunken to a certain toleration. In any other part of the world he must have passed without a struggle. But some chance had drifted him to the beaches where life is as easy as a song and his particular fate had given him a friend. And so he

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THIRTY-ONE STORIES

persisted. That was all. He persisted, a sodden lump of flesh preserved in alcohol. . . .

Karaki, his friend, was a heathen from Bougainville, where some people are smoked and others eaten. Being a black, a Melanesian, he was as much an alien in brown Fufuti as any white. He was a serious efficient little man with deeply sunken eyes, a great mop of kinky hair, and a complete absence of expression. His tastes were simple. He wore a red cotton kerchief belted around his waist and a brass curtain ring suspended from his nose.

Some powerful chief in his home island had sold Karaki into the service of the trading company for three years, annexing his salary of tobacco and beads in advance. When the time should be accomplished Karaki would be shipped back to Bougainville, a matter of some eight hundred miles, where he would land no richer than before except in experience. This was the custom. Karaki may have had plans of his own.

It is seldom that one of the black races of the Pacific shows any of the virtues for which subject populations are admired. Fidelity and humility can be exacted from other colours between tan and chocolate. But the black remains the inscrutable savage. His secret heart is his own. Hence the astonishment of Fufuti, which knew the ways of black recruits, when Karaki took the worthless beachcomber to his bosom.

"Hy, you, Johnny," called Moy Jack, the Chinese half-caste. "Better you come catch this fella mahster b'long you. He fella plenty too much drunk, galow."

Karaki left the shade of the copra shed where he had been waiting an hour or more and came forward to receive the sagging bulk that was thrust out of doors. He took it scientifically by wrist and armpit and swung toward the beach. Moy Jack stood on his threshold watching with cynic interest.

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

"Hy, you," he said; "what name you make so much bobeley 'long that fella mahster? S'pose you bling me all them fella pearl; me pay you one dam fella good trade—my word!"

It annoyed Moy Jack that he had to provide the white man with a daily drunk in exchange for the little seed pearls with which Pellett was always flush. He knew where those pearls came from. Karaki did forbidden diving in the lagoon to get them. Moy Jack made a good thing of the traffic, but he could have made a much better thing by trading directly with Karaki for a few sticks of tobacco.

"What name you give that fella mahster all them fella pearl?" demanded Moy Jack offensively. "He plenty too much no good, galow. Close up he die altogether."

Karaki did not reply. He looked at Moy Jack once, and the half-caste trailed off into mutterings. For an instant there showed a strange light in Karaki's dull eyes, like the flat, green flicker of a turning shark glimpsed ten fathoms down. . . .

Karaki bore his charge down the beach to the little thatched shelter of pandanus leaves that was all his home. Tenderly he eased Pellett to a mat, pillowed his head, bathed him with cool water, brushed the filth from his hair and whiskers. Pellett's whiskers were true whiskers, the kind that sprout like the barbels of a catfish, and they were a glorious coppery, sun-gilt red. Karaki combed them out with a sandalwood comb. Later he sat by with a fan and kept the flies from the bloated face of the drunkard.

It was a little past midday when something brought him scurrying into the open. For weeks he had been studying every weather sign. He knew that the change was due when the south-east trade begins to harden through this flawed belt of calms and cross-winds. And now, as he watched, the sharp shadows began to blur along the sands and a film crept over the face of the sun

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

All Fufuti was asleep. The house boys snored in the back verandah. Under his netting the agent dreamed happily of big copra shipments and bonuses. Moy Jack dozed among his bottles. Nobody would have been mad enough to stir abroad in the noon hour of repose: nobody but Karaki, the untamed black, who cared nothing for custom nor yet for dreams. The light pad of his steps was lost in the surf drone on the barrier reefs. He flitted to and fro like a wraith. And while Fufuti slept he applied himself to a job for which he had never been hired. . . .

Karaki had long ago ascertained two vital facts: where the key to the trade-room was kept and where the rifles and ammunition were hidden. He opened the trade-room and selected three bolts of turkey red cloth, a few knives, two cases of tobacco, and a fine small axe. There was much else he might have taken as well. But Karaki was a man of simple tastes, and efficient.

With the axe he next forced the rifle chest and removed therefrom one Winchester and a big box of cartridges. With the axe again he broke into the boat-sheds. Finally, with the axe he smashed the bottoms out of the whale boat and the two cutters so they would be of no use to anyone for many days to come. It was really a very handy little axe, a true tomahawk, ground to a shaving edge. Karaki took a workman's pleasure in its keen, deep strokes. It was almost his chief prize.

On the beach lay a big proa, a stout outrigger canoe of the kind Karaki's own people used at Bougainville, so high of prow and stern as to be nearly crescent-shaped. The north-west monsoon of last season had washed it ashore at Fufuti, and Karaki had repaired it, by the agent's own order. This proa he now launched in the lagoon, and aboard of it he stored his loot.

Of supplies he had to make a hasty selection. He took a

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

bag of rice and another of sweet potatoes. He took as many coco-nuts as he could carry in a net in three trips. He took a cask of water and a box of biscuit. And here happened an odd thing.

In his search for the biscuit he came upon the agent's private store of liquor, a dozen bottles of rare Irish whiskey. He glanced at them and passed them by. He knew what the stuff was, and he was a savage, a black man. But he passed it by. When Moy Jack heard of that later he remembered what he had seen in Karaki's eyes and ventured the surprising prediction that Karaki would never be taken alive.

When all was ready Karaki went back to his thatch and aroused Christopher Alexander Pellett.

"Hy, mahster, you come 'long me."

Mr. Pellett sat up and looked at him. That is to say, he looked. Whether he saw anything or not belongs among the obscurer questions of psychopathy.

"Too late," said Mr. Pellett profoundly. "This shop is closed. Copy boy! Give all those damned loafers good-night. I'm—I'm goin'—bed!"

Whereupon he fall flat on his back.

"Wake up, mahster," insisted Karaki, shaking him. "You too much strong fella sleep. Hy-ah, mahster! Rum! You like'm rum? You catch'm rum any amount—my word! Plenty rum, mahster!"

But even this magic call, which never failed to rouse Pellett from his couch in the mornings, fell now on deaf ears. Pellett had had his skinful, and the fitness of things decreed that he should soak the clock around.

Karaki knelt beside him, prised him up until he could get a shoulder under his middle, and lifted him like a loose bag of meal. Pellett weighed one hundred and fifty pounds; Karaki not much more than a hundred. Yet in some deft coolie fashion of his own the little black man packed his burden, with the feet dragging behind, clear down to the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

beach. Moreover, he managed to get it aboard the proa. Pellett was half drowned and the proa half swamped. But Karaki managed.

No man saw their departure. Fufuti still dreamed on. Long before the agent awoke to wrath and ruin their queer crescent craft had slipped from the lagoon and faded away on the wings of the trade.

That first day Karaki had all he could do to keep the proa running straight before the wind. Big smoky seas came piling up out of the south-east and would have piled aboard if he had given them the least chance. He was only a heathen who did not know a compass from a degree of latitude. But his forefathers used to people these waters on cockleshell voyages that make the venture of Columbus look like a ride in a ferry-boat. Karaki baled with a tin pan and sailed with a mat and steered with a paddle: but he proceeded.

Along about sunrise Mr. Pellett stirred in the bilge and raised a pea-green face. He took one bewildered glance over-side at the seething waste and collapsed with a groan. After a decent interval he tried again, but this was an illusion that would not pass, and he twisted around to Karaki sitting crouched and all aglisten with spray in the stern.

"Rum!" he demanded.

Karaki shook his head, and a haunted look crept into Pellett's eyes.

"Take—take away all that stuff," he begged pathetically, pointing at the ocean. . . .

Thereafter for two days he was very, very sick, and he learned how a small boat in any kind of a sea can move forty-seven different ways within one and the same minute. This is no trifling bit of knowledge, as those who have acquired it can tell. It was nearly fatal to Pellett.

On the third day he awoke with a mouth and a stomach

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

of fumed leather and a great weakness, but otherwise in command of his few faculties. The gale had fallen and Karaki was quietly preparing fresh coco-nuts. Pellett quaffed two before he thought to miss the brandy with which his breakfast draught was always laced. But when he remembered the milk choked in his throat.

"Me like'm rum."

"No got'm rum."

Pellett looked forward and aft, to windward and to lee. There was a great deal of horizon in sight, but nothing else. For the first time he was aware of a strangeness in events.

"What name you come so far?" he asked.

"We catch'm one big fella wind," explained Karaki.

Pellett was in no condition to question his statement nor to observe from the careful stocking of the proa that they had not been blown to sea on a casual fishing trip. Pellett had other things to think of. Some of the things were pink and others purple and others were striped like the rainbow in most surprising designs, and all were highly novel and interesting. They came thronging up out of the vasty deep to entertain Christopher Alexander Pellett. Which they did.

You cannot cut off alcohol from a man who has been continuously pickled for two years without results more or less picturesque. These were days when the proa went shouting across the empty southern seas to madrigal and choric song. Tied hand and foot and lashed under a thwart, Pellett raved in the numbers of his innocent youth. It would have been singular hearing had there been any to hear, but there was only Karaki, who did not care for the lesser Cavalier poets and on whom whole pages of "Atalanta in Calydon" were quite wasted. Now and then he threw a dipperful of sea water over the white man, or spread a mat to keep the sun from him, or fed him with coco-nut milk by force. Karaki was a poor audience, but an excellent nurse. Also, he combed Pellett's whiskers twice every day.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

They ran into calms. But the trade picked them up again more gently, so that Karaki ventured to make westing, and they fled under skies as bright as polished brass.

*"My heart is within me
As an ash in the fire;
Whosoever hath seen me
Without lute, without lyre,
Shall sing of me grievous things,
Even things that were ill to desire——"*

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellett, whose face began to show a little more like flesh and a little less like rotten kelp. . . .

Whenever a fair chance offered, Karaki landed on the lee of some one of the tiny islets with which the Santa Cruz region is peppered and would make shift to cook rice and potatoes in the tin dipper. This was risky, for one day the islet proved to be inhabited. Two white men in a cutter came out to stop them. Karaki could not hide his resemblance to a runaway nigger, and he did not try to. But when the cutter approached within fifty yards he suddenly announced himself as a runaway nigger with a gun. He left the cutter sinking and one of the men dead.

"There's a bullet hole alongside me here," said Pellett from under the thwart. "You'd better plug it."

Karaki plugged it and released his passenger, who sat up and began stretching himself with a certain naïve curiosity of his own body.

"So you're real," observed Pellett, staring hard at Karaki. "By George, you *are*, and that's comfort."

He was right. Karaki was very real.

"What side you take'm this fella canoe?"

"Balbi," said Karaki, using the native word for Bougainville.

Pellett whistled. An eight-hundred-mile evasion in an

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

open boat was a considerable undertaking. It enlisted his respect. Moreover, he had just had emphatic proof of the efficiency of this little black man.

"Balbi all same home b'long you?"

"Yes."

"All right, commodore," said Pellett. "Lead on. I don't know why you shipped me for supercargo, but I'll see you through."

Strangely—or perhaps not so strangely—the whole Fufuti interval of his history had been fading from his brain while the poison was ebbing from his tissues. The Christopher Alexander Pellett that emerged was one from earlier years: pretty much of a wreck, it was true, and a feckless, indolent, paltry creature at best, but ordinarily human and rather more than ordinarily intelligent.

He was very feeble at first, but Karaki's diet of coco-nuts and sweet potatoes did wonders for him, and the time came when he could rejoice in the good salt taste of the spray on his lips and forget for hours together the crazy craving for stimulant. They made a strange crew, this pair—simple savage and convalescent drunkard—but there was never any question as to which was in command. That was well seen in the third week when their food began to fail and Pellett noticed that Karaki ate nothing for a whole day.

"See here, this won't do," he cried. "You've given me the last coco-nut and kept none for yourself."

"Me no like'm eat," said Karaki shortly.

Christopher Alexander Pellett pondered many matters in long, idle hours while the rush of foam under the proa and the creak and fling of her outriggers were the only sounds between sea and sky. Sometimes his brow was knotted with pain. It is not always pleasant to be wrenched back into level contact with one's memories. Thoughts are no sweeter company for having long been drowned. He had met the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

horrors of delirium. He had now to face the livelier devils of his past. He had fled them before.

But here was no escape of any kind. So he turned and grappled with them and laid them one by one.

When they had been at sea twenty-nine days they had nothing left of their provisions but a little water. Karaki doled it out by moistening a shred of coco-nut husk and giving Pellett the shred to suck. In spite of Pellett's petulant protest, he would take none himself. Again the heathen nursed the derelict, this time through the last stages of thirst, scraping the staves of the cask and feeding him the ultimate drop of moisture on the point of a knife.

On the thirty-sixth day from Fufuti they sighted Choiseul, a great green wall that built up slowly across the west.

Once fairly under its headlands, Karaki might have indulged a certain triumph. He had taken as his target the whole length of the Solomons, some six hundred miles. But to have fetched the broadside of them anywhere in such a craft as the proa through storm and current, without instrument or chart, was distinctly a feat of navigation. Karaki, however, did no celebrating. Instead, he stared long and anxiously over his shoulder into the east.

The wind had been fitful since morning. By noon it was dead calm on a restless, oily sea. A barometer would have told evil tales, but Karaki must have guessed them anyway, for he staggered forward and unstepped the little mast. Then he bound all his cargo securely under the thwarts and put all his remaining strength into the paddle, heading for a small outpost island where a line of white showed beach. They had been very lucky thus far, but they were still two miles offshore when the first rush of the hurricane caught them.

Karaki himself was reduced to a rattle of bones in a dried skin, and Pellett could scarce lift a hand. But Karaki fought

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

for Pellett among the waves that leaped up like sheets of fire on the reef. Why or how they got through neither could have said. Perhaps because it was written that after drink, illness, madness, and starvation the white man should be saved by the black man again and a last time from ravening waters. When they came ashore on the islet they were both nearly flayed, but they were alive, and Karaki still gripped Pellett's shirt. . . .

For a week they stayed while Pellett fattened on unlimited coco-nut and Karaki tinkered the proa. It had landed in a water-logged tangle, but Karaki's treasures were safe. He got his bearings from a passing native fisherman, and then he knew that *all* his treasures were safe. His home island lay across Bougainville Strait, the stretch of water just beyond.

"Balbi over there?" asked Pellett.

"Yes," said Karaki.

"And a mighty good thing too," cried Pellett heartily. "This is the limit of British authority, old boy. Big fella mahster b'long Beretani stop'm here, no can go that side."

Karaki was quite aware of it. If he feared one thing in the world, he feared the Fiji High Court and its Resident Commissioner for the Southern Solomons, who did sure justice upon all who transgressed in its jurisdiction. Once beyond the strait, he might still be liable for the stolen goods and the broken contract. But never—this was the point—never could he be punished for anything he might choose to do over there in Bougainville.

So Karaki was content.

And so was Christopher Alexander Pellett. His body had been wrung and swept and scoured, and he had downed his devils. Sweet air and sunshine were on his lips and in his heart. His bones were sweet in him. As his vigour returned he swam the lagoon or helped Karaki at the proa. He would spend hours hugging the warm sand or rejoicing

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

in the delicate tracery of some tiny sea-shell, singing softly to himself, while the ground-swell hushed along the beach, savouring life as he never had done.

"Oh, this is good—good!" he said.

Karaki puzzled him. Not that he vexed himself, for a smiling wonder at everything, almost childlike, filled him these days. But he thought of this taciturn savage, how he had capped thankless service with rarest sacrifice. And now that he could consider soberly, the why of it eluded him. Why? Affection? Friendship? It must be so, and he warmed toward the silent little man with the sunken eyes and the expressionless face from which he could never raise a wink.

"Hy, you, Karaki, what name you no laugh all same me? What? You too much fright 'long that fella stuff you steal? Forget it, you old black scamp. If they ever trouble you, I'll square them somehow. By George, I'll say I stole it myself!"

Karaki only grunted and sat down to clean his Winchester with a bit of rag and some drops of oil he had crushed from a dried coco-nut.

"No, that don't reach him either," murmured Pellett, baffled. "I'd like to know what's going on under that top-knot of yours, old chap. You're like Kipling's cat, that walks by himself. God knows I'm not ungrateful. I wish I could show you——"

He sprang up.

"Karaki! Me one big fella friend 'long you: savee? You one big fella friend 'long me: savee? We two dam' big fella friend, my word! . . . What?"

"Yes," said Karaki. No other response. He looked at Pellett and he looked away toward Bougainville. "Yes," he said, "my word," and went on cleaning his gun—the black islander, inscrutable, incomprehensible, an enigma always, and to the end.

THE PRICE OF THE HEAD

The end came two days later at Bougainville.

Under a gorgeous dawn they came into a bay that opened before their prow as with jewelled arms of welcome. The land lay lapped in bright garments like a sleeper half awakened, all flushed and smiling, sensuous, intimate, thrilling with life, breathing warm scents——

These were some of the foolish phrases Pellett babbled to himself as he leaped ashore and ran up on a rocky point to see and to feel and to draw all the charm of the place to himself.

Meanwhile Karaki, that simple and efficient little man, was proceeding methodically about his own affairs. He landed his bolts of cloth, his tobacco, his knives, and the other loot. He landed his box of cartridges and his rifle and his fine tomahawk. The goods were somewhat damaged by sea water, but the weapons had been carefully cleaned and polished. . . .

Pellett was declaiming poetry aloud to the alluring solitude when he was aware of a gentle footfall and turned, surprised to find Karaki standing just behind him with the rifle at his hip and the axe in his hand.

"Well," said Pellett cheerfully, "what d'you want, old chappie?"

"Me like," said Karaki, while there gleamed in his eyes the strange light that Moy Jack had glimpsed there, like the flicker of a turning shark; "me like'm too much one fella head b'long you!"

"What? Head! Whose—my head?"

"Yes," said Karaki simply.

That was the way of it. That was all the mystery. The savage had fallen enamoured of the head of the beachcomber, and Christopher Alexander Pellett had been betrayed by his fatal red whiskers. In Karaki's country a white man's head, well smoked, is a thing to be desired above wealth, above lands and chiefships, fame, and the love

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

of women. In all Karaki's country was no head like the head of Pellett. Therefore Karaki had served to win it with the patience and single faith of a Jacob. For this he had schemed and waited, committed theft and murder, expended sweat and cunning, starved and denied himself, nursed, watched, tended, fed, and saved his man—that he might bring the head alive and on the hoof, so to speak, to the spot where he could remove it at leisure and enjoy the fruits of his labour in safety.

Pellett saw all this at a flash, understood it so far as any white could understand: the whole elemental and stupendous simplicity of it. And standing there in his new strength and sanity under the fair promise of the morning, he gave a laugh that pealed across the waters and started the sea birds from their cliffs, the deep-throated laugh of a man who fathoms and accepts the last great jest.

For finally, by corrected list, the possessions of Christopher Alexander Pellett were these: his name still intact; the ruins of some rusty ducks; his precious red whiskers—and a soul which had been neatly recovered, renewed, refurbished, reanimated, and restored to him by his good friend Karaki.

*"Thou shouldst die as he dies
For whom none sheddeth tears;
Filling thine eyes
And fulfilling thine ears
With the brilliance . . . the bloom
And the beauty . . ."*

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellett over the waters of the bay, and then whirled, throwing wide his arms:

"Shoot, damn you! It's cheap at the price!"

THE FORTUNE TELLER

By ARNOLD BENNETT

I

THE prologue to this somewhat dramatic history was of the simplest. The affair came to a climax, if one may speak metaphorically, in fire and sword and high passion, but it began like the month of March. Mr. Bostock (a younger brother of the senior partner in the famous firm of Bostocks, drapers at Hanbridge) was lounging about the tennis-court attached to his house at Hillport. Hillport has long been known as the fashionable suburb of Bursley, and indeed as the most aristocratic quarter strictly within the Five Towns; there certainly are richer neighbourhoods not far off, but such neighbourhoods cannot boast that they form part of the Five Towns—no more than Hatfield can boast that it is part of London. A man who lives in a detached house at Hillport, with a tennis-court, may be said to have succeeded in life. And Mr. Bostock had succeeded. A consulting engineer of marked talent, he had always worked extremely hard and extremely long, and thus he had arrived at luxuries. The chief of his luxuries was his daughter Florence, aged twenty-three, height five feet exactly, as pretty and as neat as a new doll, of expensive and obstinate habits. It was Florence who was the cause of the episode, and I mention her father only to show where Florence stood in the world. She ruled her father during perhaps eleven months of the year. In the twelfth month (which was

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THIRTY-ONE STORIES

usually January—after the Christmas bills) there would be an insurrection, conducted by the father with much spirit for a time, but ultimately yielding to the forces of the government. Florence had many admirers; a pretty woman, who habitually rules a rich father, is bound to have many admirers. But she had two in particular: her cousin, Ralph Martin, who had been apprenticed to her father, and Adam Tellwright, a tile manufacturer at Turnhill.

These four—the father and daughter and the rivals—had been playing tennis that Saturday afternoon. Mr. Bostock, though touching on fifty, retained a youthful athleticism; he looked and talked younger than his years, and he loved the society of young people. If he wandered solitary and moody about the tennis-court now, it was because he had a great deal on his mind besides business. He had his daughter's future on his mind.

A servant with apron-strings waving like flags in the breeze came from the house with a large loaded tea-tray, and deposited it on a wicker table on the small lawn at the end of the ash court. The rivals were reclining on deck chairs close to the table; the Object of Desire, all in starched white, stood over the table and with quick delicious movements dropped sugar and poured milk into tinkling porcelain.

"Now, father," she called briefly, without looking up, as she seized the teapot.

He approached, gazing thoughtfully at the group. Yes, he was worried. And everyone was secretly worried. The situation was exceedingly delicate, fragile, breakable. Mr. Bostock looked uneasily first at Adam Tellwright, tall, spick and span, self-confident, clever, shining, with his indubitable virtues mainly on the outside. If ever any man of thirty-two in all this world was eligible, Adam Tellwright was. Decidedly he had a reputation for preternaturally keen smartness in trade, but in trade that cannot be called a defect; on the contrary, if a man has virtues, you cannot precisely

THE FORTUNE TELLER

quarrel with him because they happen to be on the outside; the principal thing is to have virtues. And then Mr. Bostock looked uneasily at Ralph Martin, heavy, short, dark, lowering, untidy, often incomprehensible, and more often rude; with virtues concealed as if they were secret shames. Ralph was capricious. At moments he showed extraordinary talent as an engineer; at others he behaved like a nincompoop. He would be rich one day; but he had a formidable temper. The principal thing in favour of Ralph Martin was that he and Florence had always been "something to each other." Indeed of late years it had been begun to be understood that the match was "as good as arranged." It was taken for granted. Then Adam Tellwright had dropped like a bomb into the Bostock circle. He had fallen heavily and disastrously in love with the slight Florence (whom he could have crushed and eaten). At the start his case was regarded as hopeless, and Ralph Martin had scorned him. But Adam Tellwright soon caused gossip to sing a different tune, and Ralph Martin soon ceased to scorn him. Adam undoubtedly made a profound impression on Florence Bostock. He began by dazzling her, and then, as her eyes grew accustomed to the glare, he gradually showed her his good qualities. Everything that skill and tact could do Tellwright did. The same could not be said of Ralph Martin. Most people had a vague feeling that Ralph had not been treated fairly. Mr. Bostock had this feeling. Yet why? Nothing had been settled. Florence's heart was evidently still open to competition, and Adam Tellwright had a perfect right to compete. Still, most people sympathized with Ralph. But Florence did not. Young girls are like that.

Now the rivals stood about equal. No one knew how the battle would go. Adam did not know. Ralph did not know. Florence assuredly did not know. Mr. Bostock was quite certain, of a night, that Adam would win, but the next morning he was quite certain that his nephew would win.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

No wonder that the tea-party, every member of it tremendously preoccupied by the great battle, was not distinguished by light and natural gaiety. Great battles cannot be talked about till they are over and the last shot fired. And it is not to be expected that people should be bright when each knows the others to be deeply preoccupied by a matter which must not even be mentioned. The tea-party was self-conscious, highly. Therefore, it ate too many cakes and chocolate, and forgot to count its cups of tea. The conversation nearly died of inanition several times, and at last it actually did die, and the quartette gazed in painful silence at its corpse. Anyone who has assisted at this kind of a tea-party will appreciate the situation. Why, Adam Tellwright himself was out of countenance. To his honour, it was he who first revived the corpse. A copy of the previous evening's *Signal* was lying on an empty deck-chair. It had been out all night, and was dampish. Tellwright picked it up, having finished his tea, and threw a careless eye over it. He was determined to talk about something.

"By Jove!" he said. "That Balsamo johnny is coming to Hanbridge!"

"Yes, didn't you know?" said Florence, agreeably bent on resuscitating the corpse.

"What! The palmistry man?" asked Mr. Bostock, with a laugh.

"Yes." And Adam Tellwright read: "'Balsamo, the famous palmist and reader of the future, begs to announce that he is making a tour through the principal towns, and will visit Hanbridge on the 22nd inst., remaining three days. Balsamo has thousands of testimonials to the accuracy of his predictions, and he absolutely guarantees not only to read the past correctly, but to foretell the future. Address: 22 Machin Street, Hanbridge. 10 to 10. Appointment advisable in order to avoid delay.' There! He'll find himself in prison one day, that gentleman will!"

THE FORTUNE TELLER

"It's astounding what fools people are!" observed Mr. Bostock.

"Yes, isn't it!" said Adam Tellwright.

"If he'd been a gipsy," said Ralph Martin, savagely, "the police would have had him long ago." And he spoke with such grimness that he might have been talking of Adam Tellwright.

"They say his uncle and his grandfather before him were both thought-readers, or whatever you call it," said Florence.

"Do they?" exclaimed Mr. Bostock, in a different tone.

"Oh!" exclaimed Adam, also in a different tone.

"I wonder whether that's true!" said Ralph Martin.

The rumour that Balsamo's uncle and grandfather had been readers of the past and of the future produced of course quite an impression on the party. But each recognised how foolish it was to allow oneself to be so impressed in such an illogical manner. And therefore all the men burst into violent depreciation of Balsamo and the gulls who consulted him. And by the time they had done with Balsamo there was very little left of him. Anyhow, Adam Tellwright's discovery in the *Signal* had saved the tea-party from utter fiasco.

2

No. 22 Machin Street, Hanbridge, was next door to Bostock's vast emporium, and exactly opposite the more exclusive, but still mighty, establishment of Ephraim Brunt, the greatest draper in the Five Towns. It was, therefore, in the very heart and centre of retail commerce. No woman who respected herself could buy even a sheet of pins without going past No. 22 Machin Street. The ground-floor was a confectioner's shop, with a back room where tea and Berlin pancakes were served to the *élite* who had caught from London the fashion of drinking tea in public places. By the side of the confectioner's was an open door and a staircase, which led to the first floor and the other floors. A card

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

hung by a cord to a nail indicated that Balsamo had pitched his moving tent for a few days on the first floor, in a suite of offices lately occupied by a solicitor. Considering that the people who visit a palmist are just as anxious to publish their doings as the people who visit a pawnbroker—and no more—it might be thought that Balsamo had ill-chosen his site. But this was not so. Balsamo, a deep student of certain sorts of human nature, was perfectly aware that, just as necessity will force a person to visit a pawnbroker, so will inherited superstition force a person to visit a palmist, no matter what the inconveniences. If he had erected a wigwam in the middle of Crown Square and people had had to decide between not seeing him at all and running the gauntlet of a crowd's jeering curiosity, he would still have had many clients.

Of course when you are in love you are in love. Anything may happen to you then. Most things do happen. For example, Adam Tellwright found himself ascending the stairs of No. 22 Machin Street at an early hour one morning. He was, I need not say, mounting to the third floor to give an order to the potter's modeller, who had a studio up there. Still he stopped at the first floor, knocked at a door labelled "Balsamo," hesitated, and went in. I need not say that this was only fun on his part. I need not say that he had no belief whatever in palmistry, and was not in the least superstitious. A young man was seated at a desk, a stylish young man. Adam Tellwright smiled, as one who expected the stylish young man to join in the joke. But the young man did not smile. So Adam Tellwright suddenly ceased to smile.

"Are you Mr. Balsamo?" Adam enquired.

"No. I'm his secretary."

His secretary! Strange how the fact that Balsamo was guarded by a secretary, and so stylish a secretary, affected the sagacious and hard-headed Adam!

THE FORTUNE TELLER

"You wish to see him?" the secretary demanded coldly.

"I suppose I may as well," said Adam, sheepishly.

"He is disengaged, I think. But I will make sure. Kindly sit down."

Down sat Adam, playing nervously with his hat, and intently hoping that no other client would come in and trap him.

"Mr. Balsamo will see you," said the secretary, emerging through a double black portière. "The fee is a guinea."

He resumed his chair and drew towards him a book of receipt forms.

A guinea!

However, Adam paid it. The receipt form said: "Received from Mr. — the sum of one guinea for professional assistance.—Per Balsamo, J. H. K.," and a long flourish. The words "one guinea" were written. Idle to deny that this receipt form was impressive. As Adam meekly followed "J. H. K." into the Presence, he felt exactly as if he was being ushered into a dentist's cabinet. He felt as though he had been caught in the wheels of an unstoppable machine and was in vague but serious danger.

The Presence was a bold man, with a flowing light brown moustache, blue eyes, and a vast forehead. He wore a black velvet coat, and sat at a small table on which was a small black velvet cushion. There were two doors to the rooms, each screened by double black portières, and beyond a second chair and a large transparent ball, such as dentists use, there was no other furniture.

"Better give me your hat," said the secretary, and took it from Adam, who parted from it reluctantly, as if from his last reliable friend. Then the portières swished together, and Adam was alone with Balsamo.

Balsamo stared at him; did not even ask him to sit down.

"Why do you come to me? You don't believe in me," said Balsamo, curtly. "Why waste your money?"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"How can I tell whether I believe in you or not?" protested Adam Tellwright, the shrewd man of business, very lamely. "I've come to see what you can do."

Balsamo snapped his fingers.

"Sit down then," said he, "and put your hands on this cushion. No!—palms up!"

Balsamo gaped at them a long time, rubbing his chin. Then he rose, adjusted the transparent glass ball so that the light came through it on to Adam's hands, sat down again and resumed his stare.

"Do you want to know everything?" he asked.

"Yes—of course."

"Everything?"

"Yes." A trace of weakness in this affirmative.

"Well, you mustn't expect to live much after fifty-two. Look at the line of life there." He spoke in such a casual, even antipathetic tone that Adam was startled.

"You've had success. You will have it continuously. But you won't live long."

"What have I to avoid?" Adam demanded.

"Can't avoid your fate. You asked me to tell you everything."

"Tell me about my past," said Adam, feebly, the final remnant of shrewdness in him urging him to get the true measure of Balsamo before matters grew worse.

"Your past?" Balsamo murmured. "Keep your left hand quite still, please. You aren't married. You're in business. You've never thought of marriage—till lately. It's not often I see a hand like yours. Your slate is clean. Till lately you never thought of marriage."

"How lately?"

"Who can say when the idea of marriage first came to you? You couldn't say yourself. Perhaps about three months ago. Yes—three months. I see water—you have crossed the sea. Is all this true?"

THE FORTUNE TELLER

"Yes," admitted Adam.

"You're in love, of course. Did you know you have a rival?"

"Yes." Once more Adam was startled.

"Is he fair? No, he's not fair. He's dark. Isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Ah! The woman. Uncertain, uncertain. Mind you I never undertake to foretell anything; all I guarantee is that what I do foretell will happen. Now, you will be married in a year or eighteen months." Balsamo stuck his chin out with the gesture of one who imparts grave news; then paused reflectively.

"Whom to?"

"Ah! There are two women. One fair, one dark. Which one do you prefer?"

"The dark one," Adam replied in spite of himself.

"Perhaps the fair one has not yet come into your life? No. But she will do."

"But which shall I marry?"

"Look at that line. No, here! See how indistinct and confused it is. Your destiny is not yet settled. Frankly, I cannot tell you with certainty. No one can go in advance of destiny. Ah! Young man, I sympathize with you."

"Then, really you can't tell me."

"Listen! I might help you. Yes, I might help you."

"How?"

"The others will come to me."

"What others?"

"Your rival. And the woman you love."

"And then?"

"What is not marked on your hand may be very clearly marked on theirs. Come to me again."

"How do you know they will come? They both said they should not."

"You said you would not. But you are here. Rely on

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

me. They will come. I might do a great deal for you. Of course it will cost you more. One lives in a world of money, and I sell my powers, like the rest of mankind. I am proud to do so."

"How much will it cost?"

"Five pounds. You are free to take it or leave it, naturally."

Adam Tellwright put his hand in his pocket.

"Have the goodness to pay my secretary," Balsamo stopped him icily.

"I beg pardon," said Adam, out of countenance.

"Of course if they do not come the money will be returned. Now, before you go, you might tell me all you know about him, and about her. All. Omit nothing. It is not essential, but it might help me. There is a chance that it might make things clearer than they otherwise could be. The true palmist never refuses any aid."

And Adam thereupon went into an elaborate account of Florence Bostock and Ralph Martin. He left out nothing, not even that Ralph had a wart on his chin, and had once broken a leg; nor that Florence had once been nearly drowned in a swimming-bath in London.

3

It was the same afternoon.

Balsamo stared calmly at a young dark-browed man who had entered his sanctuary with much the same air as a village bumpkin assumes when he is about to be shown the three-card trick on a race-course. Balsamo did not even ask him to sit down.

"Why do you come to me? You don't believe in me," said Balsamo, curtly. "Why waste your half-sovereign?"

Ralph Martin, not being talkative, said nothing.

"However!" Balsamo proceeded. "Sit down, please. Let

THE FORTUNE TELLER

me look at your hands. Ah! yes! Do you want to know anything?"

"Yes, of course."

"Everything?"

"Certainly."

"Let me advise you, then, to give up all thoughts of that woman."

"What woman?"

"You know what woman. She is a very little woman. Once she was nearly drowned—far from here. You've loved her for a long time. You thought it was a certainty. And upon my soul you were justified in thinking so—almost! Look at that line. But it isn't a certainty. Look at that line!"

Balsamo gazed at him coldly, and Ralph Martin knew not what to do or to say. He was astounded; he was frightened; he was desolated. He perceived at once that palmistry was after all a terrible reality.

"Tell me some more," he murmured.

And so Balsamo told him a great deal more, including full details of a woman far finer than Florence Bostock, whom he was destined to meet in the following year. But Ralph Martin would have none of this new woman. Then Balsamo said suddenly:

"She is coming. I see her coming."

"Who?"

"The little woman. She is dressed in white, with a gold-and-white sunshade, and yellow gloves and boots, and she has a gold reticule in her hand. Is that she?"

Ralph Martin admitted that it was she. On the other hand, Balsamo did not admit that he had seen her an hour earlier and had made an appointment with her.

There was a quiet knock on the door. Ralph started.

"You hear," said Balsamo, quietly. "I fear you will never win her."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"You said just now positively that I shouldn't," Ralph exclaimed.

"I did not," said Balsamo. "I would like to help you. I am very sorry for you. It is not often I see a hand like yours. I might be able to help you; the destiny is not yet settled."

"I'll give you anything to help me," said Ralph.

"It will be a couple of guineas," said Balsamo.

"But what guarantee have I?" Ralph asked rudely, when he had paid the money—to Balsamo, not to the secretary. Such changes of humour were characteristic of him.

"None!" said Balsamo, with dignity, putting the sovereigns on the table. "But I am sorry for you. I will tell you what you can do. You can go behind those curtains there"—he pointed to the inner door—"and listen to all that I say."

A proposal open to moral objections! But when you are in the state that Ralph Martin was in, and have experienced what he had just experienced, your outlook upon morals is apt to be disturbed.

4

"Young lady," Balsamo was saying, "rest assured that I have not taken five shillings from you for nothing. Your lover has a wart on his chin."

Daintiness itself sat in front of him, with her little porcelain hands lying on the black cushion. And daintiness was astonished into withdrawing those hands.

"Please keep your hands still," said Balsamo, firmly, and proceeded: "But you have another lover, older, who has recently come into your life. Fair, tall. A successful man who will always be successful. Is it not so?"

"Yes," a little voice muttered.

"You can't make up your mind between them? Answer me."

THE FORTUNE TELLER

"No."

"And you wish to learn the future. I will tell you—you will marry the fair man. That is your destiny. And you will be very happy. You will soon perceive the bad qualities of the one with the wart. He is a wicked man. I need not urge you to avoid him. You will do so."

"A bad man!"

"A bad man. You see there are two sovereigns lying here. That man has actually tried to bribe me to influence you in his favour?"

"Ralph?"

"Since you mention his Christian name, I will mention his surname. It is written here. Martin."

"He can't have—possibly——"

Balsamo strode with offended pride to the portière, and pulled it away, revealing Mr. Ralph Martin, who for the second time that afternoon knew not what to say or to do.

"I tell you——" Ralph began, as red as fire.

"Silence, sir! Let this teach you not to try to corrupt an honest professional man! Surely I had amply convinced you of my powers! Take your miserable money!" He offered the miserable money to Ralph, who stuck his hands in his pockets, whereupon Balsamo flung the miserable money violently on to the floor.

A deplorable scene followed, in which the presence of Balsamo did not prevent Florence Bostock from conveying clearly to Ralph what she thought of him. They spoke before Balsamo quite freely, as two people will discuss maladies before a doctor. Ralph departed first; then Florence. Then Balsamo gathered up the sovereigns. He had honestly earned Adam's fiver, and since Ralph had refused the two pounds—

"I have seen their hands," said Balsamo the next day to Adam Tellwright. "All is clear. In a month you will be engaged to her."

"A month?"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"A month. I regret that I had a painful scene with your rival. But of course professional etiquette prevents me from speaking of that. Let me repeat, in a month you will be engaged to her."

This prophecy came true. Adam Tellwright, however, did not marry Florence Bostock. One evening, in a secluded corner at a dance, Ralph Martin, without warning, threw his arms angrily, brutally, instinctively round Florence's neck and kissed her. It was wrong of him. But he conquered her. Love is like that. It hides for years, and then pops out, and won't be denied. Florence's engagement to Adam was broken. She married Ralph. She knew she was marrying a strange, dark-minded man of uncertain temper, but she married him.

As for the unimpeachable Adam, he was left with nothing but the uneasy fear that he was doomed to die at fifty-two. His wife (for he got one, and a good one) soon cured him of that.

THE COLLECTOR

By MAY SINCLAIR

I HAVE known many collectors of celebrities, but none of them have been a patch on Mrs. Folyat-Raikes.

She was an old friend of my mother's. That was how I came to know her. I may have made it a little too apparent that it was filial piety that brought me to Cadogan Gardens, for she put me in my place at once by assuring me that I would always be welcome there for my dear mother's sake. If I had any illusions as to my footing she destroyed them by the little air of mournful affection that explained my obscure presence and condoned it. That was one of the ways by which she maintained her unspeakable prestige.

And yet I happened to know that she had inquired into my activities sufficiently to assure herself that I might ultimately have value. She was an infallible appraiser of values, she had the instinct of the auction room, and I do not think that in a life-time of collecting she had ever wasted as much as one "At Home" card.

She had been at the game for years when I first met her, so I can't throw much light on her beginnings. She always struck me as a singularly stupid woman, but I've heard that she was handsome in her youth. She's handsome still, though haggard with the pursuit—the frantic, never-ending hunt.

She was a daughter of Lord Braintree's, also the widow of a fellow who had distinguished himself in the diplomatic service, which may have helped her. She had got the plant;

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

she had no difficulty in picking up the patter, and she was born with the passion and the instinct.

The most marvellous thing about her is her success. It began in the early eighties, when, going straight (with her flair) for the rarest, she secured Ford Lankester. He never could resist a woman if she was young, well-born, and handsome, and when the daughter of Lord Braintree held out the laurels he stooped his head and played very prettily at being crowned. After that, collecting became easy. She had only to write on her card "To meet Mr. Ford Lankester," and she filled her big drawing-room in Cadogan Gardens. At one time she was said to have the finest collection in London. Only ten years ago Everybody who was Somebody was sure to be seen in it; not to be seen argued that you were nobody. Thus you were fairly terrorised into being seen. Even now when most celebrities are smaller, and the few big ones are getting shy, by dint of playing off one against the other she continues to collect.

But she is not so young as she was nor yet so handsome; other hostesses are in the business; she feels the stress of competition; she has endured insolences, evasions, impolite refusals; she knows that one or two of the younger men, Grevill Burton for instance, will not be seen inside her house, and she is getting nervous.

That is why her last adventure, the Great Hunting of Watt Gunn, became the violent, disastrous yet exciting spectacle it was.

In the beginning she had no trouble in getting hold of him. It was far easier than her first triumph, the capture of Ford Lankester.

As you know, Watt Gunn's greatness dropped on him suddenly, after he had been toiling for eight years in obscurity. Nobody, he said, was more surprised at it than himself. For eight years he had been writing things every bit as good as *The New Aspasia*, without getting himself discovered. He was the son of a little draper at Surbiton and

THE COLLECTOR

had worked for eight years as his father's cashier. He used to say mournfully that he supposed his "grand mistake" was not going in for journalism. It wasn't his grand mistake, it was his grand distinction, his superhuman luck. It kept him turning out one masterpiece after another, all fresh, with the dew on them, at an age when the talent of most novelists begins to turn grey. It kept him pure from any ulterior motive. Above all, it kept him from the clutches of the collector.

But it had this disadvantage that when he did emerge, he emerged in a state of utter innocence, naked of sophistication as when he was born. He had no suspicion of the dangers that lurked for him in Mrs. Folyat-Raikes's drawing-room. He didn't know that there were two kinds of celebrities, those who were too small to be asked there, and those who were too big to go. There was nobody to tell him that he was much too big. He went because he understood that he would meet the sort of people he had wanted all his life to meet.

He met—first of all—Furnival and me.

It was touching how from the very first—and afterwards, in his extremity—he clung to us. Positively, it was as if then—before he had lost his crystalline simplicity—he had had some premonition of disaster, and felt, subconsciously, that we might save him.

But it went, that pure and savage sense of his, in his first year.

I can see him now sitting beside Mrs. Folyat-Raikes—always impeccably dressed, bright-eyed and a little flushed—at the head of her beautiful mahogany table. I can see his hair (he had never trained it), that rose irrepressibly in a crest or comb from back to front along the top of his head, and his innocent moustache that drooped as if it deprecated the behaviour of his hair. I can see his shy, untutored courtliness, his jerky aplomb, his little humorous, interrogative air that seemed to say, "I'm carrying it off pretty well—

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

for a chap that isn't used to it—my greatness, eh?" I seem to hear his guileless intonations; I follow, fascinated, the noble, reckless rush of his aitches as they fell through space; I taste the strange and piercing flavour of the accents that were his.

It seemed to me horrible, inconceivable, that he liked being there.

And yet there can be no doubt that he did like it, just at first. It gave him, just at first, the things that he had missed, the opportunities. It satisfied his everlasting curiosity as to contemporary manners and the social scene. And just at first it didn't hurt him. He continued to produce, with a humour and a freshness unimpaired, those inimitable annals of his class.

In his second year Watt Gunn had made his way everywhere. He didn't push. He was so frightfully celebrated that he had no need to. He was pushed. The mass bore down on him. Competition had set in. All the collectors in the western and south-western districts contended with Mrs. Folyat-Raikes for the possession of Watt Gunn. But she held her own, for he was grateful to her. You saw her sweep by, haggard with pursuit, but trailing Watt Gunn on the edge of her sagging, voluminous, Victorian gown.

It was pitiful to watch the gradual sophistication of the naïf creature, his polishing and hardening under the social impact, and the blunting of his profound and primal instincts. They clipped his wings, among them, and the wings of his wild aitches. Very soon he lost his shyness and his tingling Cockney flavour.

Presently his work began to suffer. It was becoming more brilliant, more astoundingly intellectual; but the dewiness and the divine simplicity were going.

We, Grevill Burton, Furnival and I, told him so.

He knew it; and he knew the cause of it. But he defended himself. When we said, "For God's sake keep out

THE COLLECTOR

of it," he said he couldn't. "I want," he said, "to get the hang of the thing. If I'm going to draw the upper classes, I must see what they're like. I can't invent 'em. Who could?"

And when Furny told him for his good that he was a snob at bottom, he merely said, "Of course I am. Who isn't?"

And there was some truth in it. I do not think that—except at the very last—he was ever able to forget that Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was a daughter of Lord Braintree.

But he had his moments of terrible lucidity. What was the matter with him, he would say, was simply his damned celebrity. He couldn't get rid of it. If only, he moaned, he could curl up and creep back into obscurity again. But he couldn't. It was, he said, as if a rose should shut and be a bud again.

And so the rose went on expanding till it began to fade, and its leaves fell, one by one, on Mrs. Folyat-Raikes's drawing-room floor.

His publishers saw nothing wrong with the novel he brought out in his third year. It sold all right. But he was thoroughly frightened. As if it had been the first symptom of a retributive malady, that novel sobered him. You see, he was not a snob at bottom; only at the top. At bottom he was a very serious artist; and he had realised his appalling danger.

And then the great fight began.

It lasted two years, and was made hideous by an element of personal virulence on both sides, secret but profound. Secret, that is, at first. At first, Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was merely unscrupulous, and Watt Gunn merely evasive. He lied, but with no hope of really deceiving her. He would refuse three invitations running on the plea that he was out of town. He wasn't, and she knew it, and he knew that she knew it, and that she would forgive him anything. Then, because he was a kind little chap at heart and hated to hurt

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

people, he would dine with her twice running to make up. And their mutual fear and hostility would smoulder. Then her clutches would tighten, and he would break loose again, madly. His excuses became disgraceful, preposterous, fantastic. A child could have seen through them.

So I wasn't in the least surprised when he came to me one day and told me that he had got appendicitis. He was going into a nursing home, he said, on the fourteenth.

"You mean," I said, "that Mrs. Raikes has a dinner-party on the fifteenth, to which you were invited."

He said he meant that he was going.

He said it in that rather hoarse, rather squeaky voice of his that carried conviction. There was about him a morbid exaltation and excitement. I was to tell everybody that he was going.

And he went.

I called to see him three days after. His nursing home—I'm not going to tell you exactly where it was, but it was in a beautiful green square with lots of trees in it. I found him established in a lofty room on the first floor. He was sitting up in bed by the window, flushed and bright-eyed, looking at the trees, simply looking at them.

I couldn't at first detach him from his contemplation of the square garden. He said he liked it; it was "so jolly bosky." "And, oh, Simpson, the peace, the blessed peace of it!" He had his fountain pen and writing-pad in bed with him, but he hadn't written a line. He said he was too happy.

I inquired about his appendicitis. He shook his head gravely, and said that an operation was not considered necessary at present, but that he would have to stay in the nursing home for five or six weeks to make sure.

"Five or six weeks, Simpson. Longer, perhaps. In fact, I don't know when I shall be out."

I told him he'd be bored to death, and that he couldn't stand it. But he said "No," he was happier in that nursing

THE COLLECTOR

home than he had been for years. They didn't treat him a bit like a celebrity. And all he wanted was to lie there and have his hair brushed.

He lay there for three weeks, and I suppose he had his hair brushed, for it lay flatter, which gave him a look of extraordinary well-being and peace. And at the end of three weeks he came to me in my studio by night.

Grevill Burton, and Furnival were there, and he simply threw himself on our mercy.

He said he was still supposed to be in the nursing home. Yes, I was right. He hadn't been able to stand it. It was all very well at first. He'd liked having his hair brushed—the little nurse who brushed it was distinctly pretty. But he'd got tired of it in a week. He'd squared the sister, and the nurses, and the doctor—squared 'em all round—and if anybody inquired for him at the home they'd hear that Mr. Watt Gunn's condition was about the same, and that he was not allowed to see anybody. If Furny liked to put a paragraph in that rag of his about his condition being the same, he might.

Thus, with a delicious, child-like joy in his own ingenuity, he span the first threads of the tangle that afterwards enmeshed him.

He went down into the country to write a book. Nobody but Burton and I (we couldn't trust Furny) knew where he was. Officially, he was in the nursing home. Mrs. Folyat-Raikes called there every day and brought back the bulletin and published it all round.

(He'd reckoned on that.)

Well, he kept it up for weeks—months. Burton and I went down to see him in September.

We found him chuckling over the success of his plot. He admitted it had been a bit expensive. His three weeks in the home, at fifteen guineas a week, had come to forty-five guineas. With doctors, and one thing and another, the game

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

had cost him over seventy. But it was, he said, money well invested. It would mean hundreds and thousands of pounds in his pocket. A hundred pounds, he'd calculated, for every week he was supposed to be still there. He'd finished his book, and, if he could only keep it up a few months longer, he thought he could easily do another. He was so fit, he said, he could do 'em on his head.

It struck me there was something ominous in his elation.

For the thing presently began to leak out. I swear it wasn't through me, or Burton, or even Furny; but you see the entire staff of the nursing home was in the secret, and the nurses may have talked to patients—you don't have Watt Gunn in a nursing home for nothing. Anyhow, I was rung up one day by Mrs. Folyat-Raikes. I heard her uncanny telephone voice saying, "Do you know what has become of Mr. Watt Gunn?" I answered as coolly as I could, "No, I didn't."

And then the voice squeaked in my ear, "I hear he's broken down completely and gone away, leaving no address."

I called a taxi then and there, and went round to Cadogan Gardens. I found the poor lady wilder and more haggard than ever. (You may imagine what it meant to her!)

She dropped her voice to tell me that her information was authentic. Mr. Watt Gunn was not in the nursing home. He never had been in a nursing home at all. She had not written to him because she understood that letters were not allowed in the Institution.

That was where Watt Gunn's ingenuity had landed him.

The story was all over London in three days. (She was bound to spread it to account for his non-appearance at her parties.) You couldn't stop it. It had got into the papers. And though Watt Gunn's publisher (in view of his forthcoming novel) published emphatic contradictions, nobody believed them. And when the book (his masterpiece!) came

THE COLLECTOR

out, the effect on his royalties was lamentable. In America it simply ruined him.

He tried desperately to recover—to live it down. He had some scheme of going on a lecturing tour in the States. But his agents made inquiries and advised him not. A lecturing tour in the States, they said, at the present juncture, would prove a miserable fiasco—even if he could effect a landing. He, the darling of the American public, whose triumph on “the other side” had been a gorgeous fairy tale, saw himself returned on his country’s hands as an insane alien.

His American publisher (terrified by these rumours) came over himself for the sole purpose of seeing what was the matter with Watt Gunn. And in spite of all that Burton, Furnival, and I could tell him, he was not altogether reassured. He went about too much. Besides, by this time Watt Gunn had got so nervy over it all that his behaviour lent itself to suspicion.

Then the poor little chap persuaded himself that his only chance was to be seen again at Mrs. Folyat-Raikes’s.

For the next three months he was seen there and everywhere. Furny published a funny account of the whole thing, and Watt Gunn was ultimately reinstated.

And the struggle and the agony began all over again.

It was sharper because of the peace he had known. I can’t tell you all Mrs. Folyat-Raikes’s ruses, and Watt Gunn’s revolts and flights, his dastardly and pitiable shifts. He had, I believe, a matrimonial project which he abandoned as too drastic, besides being probably ineffectual. And then he did a really clever thing. It served him for a whole season.

I ought to tell you that Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was the most straight-laced hostess of her generation. Nobody was admitted to her house who had once figured in a scandal. And Watt Gunn had never figured, and never desired to figure;

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

he couldn't, he used to say, be bored. Really, he had preserved the virtues and traditions of his class, besides being constitutionally timid in seductive presences. Then suddenly and conspicuously, in the beginning of the season, he figured. He appeared (you may remember it) as co-respondent in a rather bad divorce case. There were three other co-respondents, but they had been kept out of it in the interests of Watt Gunn. I don't know how he had worked it, anyhow the little chap appeared, wearing his borrowed purple with an air of reckless magnificence in sin. I can see him now, solemn and flushed with the weight and importance of it, stalking slowly up the staircase of the old Marlborough Club, trailing that gorgeous iniquity. He had the look of a man who has completely vindicated himself.

He spoke of it in the smoke-room (we were dining with him). He said it had been an awful bore, but he didn't grudge the time and trouble. He had been a benefactor to two miserable people who wanted to get rid of each other; he had saved three happy homes from a devastating scandal (the three other co-respondents were married men), and, incidentally, he had saved himself.

He had, but not for long.

His next book had a furious success on the strength of the divorce suit. He was ten times more celebrated and ten times more valuable. Somebody told Mrs. Folyat-Raikes that it had been a put-up job, and that Watt Gunn had been made use of. She found extenuating circumstances. She said to Furnival and me, "We must save him from those dreadful people." She meant that she must.

And then Watt Gunn turned nasty. He refused every invitation, not taxing his invention in the least, and sometimes employing a secretary. Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was reduced to hunting him in other people's houses and at public dinners. She was to be seen rushing through vast reception-rooms when they were emptying, haggard in her excitement,

THE COLLECTOR

trailing her Victorian skirts and shawls and laces. Or you found her wedged in the packing crowd, lifting her eternal lorgnon. And she would seize you as you passed and cry, "They tell me Mr. Watt Gunn is here. I'm looking for Mr. Watt Gunn."

He had become dangerous to hunt. He stuck at nothing. Poor hunted thing; he proved his origin by brutal "Nos" and irritable snarlings, and turnings of his little round back. But he managed to write and publish "Revolution." He had escaped her clutches for a whole year.

At last she tracked him down at the Abadams'. He was there because I'd brought him. I'd found old Abadam worth cultivating. I had a one-man show on that week, and he bought three of my things the year before. Besides, they engaged some Russian dancers, and we couldn't resist that.

Furnival and Grevill Burton came with us, and when we caught sight of Mrs. Folyat-Raikes we closed round Watt Gunn. He isn't tall, but she was bound to spot him in the crowd, his hair was so funny.

I don't think he saw her all at once. I was in the big reception-room upstairs, after the dancers had gone, when people were trickling down to supper. There was a long, clear space between her and Watt Gunn, and she was bearing down on us.

Furny got hold of his left arm, and by exerting a gentle pressure we hoped to get him decorously away. But that startled him (he was fearfully jumpy), and he looked round. She was then within five yards of him.

You never saw more frantic terror on any human face. I don't know exactly what he did, but he broke loose from Furnival somehow—I think he ducked—and then he bolted. We saw him going clean through people and making for the door there was on the right.

Furnival and I took Mrs. Folyat-Raikes down to supper, by way of covering his retreat. There was only one other

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

thing to do, and that was to sacrifice Grevill Burton—to throw him to her. This, I can see it now, was what we ought to have done; it was the only thing that would have taken her mind off Watt Gunn; but at the time it seemed too hard on Burton.

So Furny and I took her down to supper. We'd got the same plan in our heads—quite a good one. We were to land her well inside the dining-room, Furny was to hold her in play while I foraged for iced coffee and fruit salad and *paté de fois gras*. The idea was to keep her feeding long enough to give Watt Gunn a chance.

Well, it didn't come off. In the first place the room was crammed, and we couldn't get her far enough in. Then, after she'd sent me for iced coffee she changed her mind and wanted champagne cup, and told Furny to go and get it. And like a fool he went. And before we could get back to her, if you'll believe me, she'd slipped out.

What must have happened next we heard from Watt Gunn afterwards.

I ought to tell you that she had this advantage over him, that she knew the house and he didn't. It's in Great Cumberland Place, and Abadam had pulled half of it down and built it up again over the back garden. There were galleries in it and bedroom suites, and twisty corridors, and little staircases where you least expected them. The door Watt Gunn had disappeared through led into the library, and the library led into the Italian room, and the Italian room into the Japanese room, and the Japanese room into Mrs. Abadam's boudoir.

Mrs. Folyat-Raikes's first movement was comparatively simple. It was to go back up the big front staircase, and, avoiding the reception room, enter the library where Watt Gunn was, through the door that gave upon the landing.

Watt Gunn was all alone in the library. He had found a comfortable armchair under the electric ring, and he was

THE COLLECTOR

reading. He had his back to the door Mrs. Folyat-Raikes went in by, but he says he felt it in his spine that she was there. That door was near and at right angles to the door of the reception room, so that he only had one way of escape—the door into the Italian room.

He took it.

He says that the rest of his flight through Abadam's house was like an abominable dream. He was convinced that Mrs. Folyat-Raikes was following him. He closed every door behind him, and he felt her following him. He went slap through the Italian room, at a hand gallop, into the Japanese room. The Japanese room was difficult to negotiate because of the screens that were about. He saw Buddhas smiling and frightful Gods and Samurais grinning at him as he dashed into Mrs. Abadam's boudoir. He had had the presence of mind to switch the electric light off behind him as he went. But there was no light in the boudoir. He went tumbling over things; he trod on a cat, and upset a table and a cage with Mrs. Abadam's parrot in it. He says he thought he heard a screen go down in the Japanese room as he left it, and that frightened him.

At the far end of the boudoir there was a little door. It was ajar and a light showed in the opening. He rushed through, slamming the door behind him, and found himself on a narrow landing at the foot of a little spiral staircase. On his left another little staircase went twisting away to the floor below. Watt Gunn didn't know it, but these were the almost secret stairs leading to Mrs. Abadam's private apartments. He said he thought they were the back stairs.

We asked him later on whether, at the moment of his flight, after he had broken loose from us, he had seen Mrs. Folyat-Raikes pursuing him. And he said "No," not exactly. Not, that was to say, with his eyes. He saw her with his spine. He says that, as far as he could describe his sensations, long, wriggling, fibrous threads, feelers, he called

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

them, went streaming out backwards from each one of his vertebræ, and that by means of them he knew that she was after him. He says that, when he slammed the door of the boudoir, these feelers recoiled and lashed him up the spiral staircase. He came out at the corner of a long corridor, in what he took to be the servants' quarters, where, if anywhere, he would be safe.

There was a door at each end of the corridor. The nearer one was open, disclosing a housemaid's cupboard, but the passage through it was obstructed by the housemaid. The corridor gave him a clear course for sprinting, so he made at top speed for the further door.

It took him straight into Mrs. Abadam's bath-room.

His first thought was wonder at the marvellous luck that had landed him just there, in the most secret, the most absolutely safe position in the whole house, where, without incurring grave suspicion, he could lock himself in.

There were three doors, the one he'd come by, one leading into Abadam's dressing-room, and one into Mrs. Abadam's bedroom. He locked them all, the outer door first, then the bedroom door, then, to make himself, as he put it, impregnable, the inner door of the dressing-room. Beyond it was Abadam's bedroom.

He says he never saw anything like that bath-room, neither could he have imagined it. It was worth the whole adventure, just to have seen it once. He could have spent hours in it, going round and looking at things. It was all white tiles, white porcelain, and silver fittings. There was a great porcelain bath in one corner, and a shower-bath in another, with white silk mackintosh curtains all round it; and a recess all fitted up with sprays; rose sprays, and needle sprays that you could direct on to any part of you you chose. There was a couch where you could lie and be massaged; oh, and an immense linen cupboard let into the wall with hot-water pipes running up and down it.

THE COLLECTOR

There wasn't a detail of that bath-room that he missed. And he seems to have made considerable explorations in Abadam's dressing-room, too.

But just at first he kept pretty quiet. He lay on the couch and gave himself up to the great white peace and purity of it all. He hadn't any idea in his head or any plan. It was only when the maid came to get Mrs. Abadam's bath ready, and began trying all the doors, that he acted, and then it was by an ungovernable impulse.

It was the sight of the beautiful white porcelain bath that made him do it, and, possibly, the feeling that he had got to account for being there. Anyhow, before he really knew what he was about he'd turned on the hot water, undressed, and got into the bath.

It might have been better, he said afterwards, if he'd got into the linen cupboard and kept quiet. But the rushing of the hot water covered him and made him feel so safe. More than all, he wanted to wash those infernal feelers off his spine.

So he splashed about; and, when he was tired of splashing, he just lay and soaked, turning on the water hot and hot. And when he was tired of the big bath he tried the shower bath just to see what it was like.

It was what the shower bath did to him that put his idea into his head.

You see, he'd got to get out of the house somehow, and he didn't quite know how. He supposed it would have to be through one of the bedrooms, down the big front staircase, through the great hall where everybody would be collected, and he didn't want to be recognised.

Remember, he had the range of Abadam's dressing-room.

He couldn't have been up there more than five-and-twenty minutes when Abadam came to me in the supper-room and took me aside mysteriously. (When I saw his face I knew

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

it was all up with my picture show.) He was followed by a young footman.

He said, "It was you who brought that fellow, Watt Gunn, here, wasn't it?"

I said it was, and that Mrs. Abadam—but he cut me short. He said, "He's been having supper."

I stared, because that was precisely what he hadn't had, poor chap.

"He's *been having supper*, and he's got into my wife's bath-room and he won't come out."

We sneaked out of the dining-room, Abadam, and Funnival and I. The young footman led us up the back stairs and through a door (the door by the housemaid's cupboard where Watt Gunn had seen the housemaid standing) and so into the corridor.

We found a small crowd gathered before the bath-room door. There was Mrs. Abadam's maid with a nightgown and a loose wrapper over her arm, and a pair of gorgeous slippers in her hand. She was trying to look indignant and superior. There was the upper housemaid and the under housemaid, and Abadam's valet. The girls were sniggering and giggling, while the valet endeavoured to parley respectfully with Watt Gunn through the bath-room door. And you could hear Watt Gunn's voice, all irascible and squeaky, coming through the door.

"'Ang it all, I can't come until you tell me——"

Abadam was saying, "What's that he says?" And the valet put his ear to the door.

"He says he can't come out, sir. He says he wants to know if Mrs.—Mrs. What's the name, sir?—Mrs. Folyat-Raikes is still here, sir. He seems to have got her on his mind, sir."

"Tell him he can't see Mrs. Raikes. He isn't in a fit state."

You could hear Watt Gunn still squeaking frantically and the valet parleying and interpreting.

THE COLLECTOR

"He says he doesn't want to see her, sir. And—what's that, sir? Oh—He doesn't want her to see him, sir."

Abadam said he was glad he was sober enough for that. We couldn't hear what Watt Gunn said, but we heard the valet.

"I'm sure I can't tell you, sir—He won't open the door for me, sir."

Then Abadam turned savagely on me. "Here—see what you can do, Simpson. You brought him in, and it's up to you to get him out."

I wriggled through to the door.

"It's all right, old chap," I said. "You can come out now."

I could just hear his small, thin voice saying, "That you, Simpson? Is *she* there?"

I said, "Of course she isn't. Can't you see where you are? You're in Mrs. Abadam's bath-room."

He said, "I know that. If you'll swear it's all right, I'll open the door."

I did swear, and he opened the door, and we all saw him.

That's to say, we saw a figure. You couldn't have known it was Watt Gunn. His hair was parted in the middle and lay flat down, all sleeked by the shower-bath and by some odorous oil that he'd found in Abadam's dressing-room. He'd got hold of the wax that Abadam uses, and he'd twisted up the ends of his little moustache till it looked as ferocious as the German Emperor's. And he was wearing Abadam's dressing-gown, blue brocade with cerise collar and cuffs. I daresay it wasn't a bit too big for Abadam (he's the tall kind, all legs and arms, over and above his nose), but it swallowed up Watt Gunn at one mouthful—all but his little, sleek head and the terrifying upturned moustache; and it trailed along the floor behind him.

I don't suppose even he knew what he looked like, but

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

from the expression of Abadam's face as he gazed at him I conceived a faint hope for my show.

The servants, being well-trained, had fled at the first sight of him. All except the valet, who was officially entitled to remain.

Watt Gunn still stood in the bath-room door and glared at us over his moustache.

He said, when we'd quite done laughing, perhaps we'd tell him how he was to get out of that confounded place without being seen. We told him first of all to get into his own clothes; but when he'd got into them he still insisted that he didn't want to be seen. (His mind was running on Mrs. Folyat-Raikes.)

Abadam said it would be very unpleasant for everybody if he *was* seen; and we said, of course, he mustn't be. Abadam, with the idea he had and his fear of unpleasantness, played beautifully into our hands.

And so we got him away, down the back stairs, through the basement, and out up the area steps, wearing the butler's light covert coat over his own dress suit.

Burton declares that he saw Mrs. Folyat-Raikes in the distance, sweeping through the reception-room and crying, "I'm looking for Mr. Watt Gunn. Has anybody seen Mr. Watt Gunn?"

And the Abadams go about saying that Watt Gunn drinks. They say he has it in bouts, and that he retires periodically to a home for inebriates somewhere near Leith Hill.

But even that hasn't done him any good. He is more celebrated than ever.

IN A CITY THAT IS NOW PLOUGHED FIELDS

By REBECCA WEST

THE child sat on a silver cushion in the middle of the long cool room, whose coolness was itself a luxury in this place of molten skies and with a rather dirty little golden hand traced in the air the pattern of the Persian rug on the wall before her. It was a good pattern—a tree of gold that lifted apples against a background of blue like the night when the lamplight streams out on it—and the colours pleased her as though they had been good to eat. Her little pink tongue stuck out abstractedly at the corner of her mouth, sometimes reaching still further to lick up traces of the many sweetmeats she had eaten during the past two hours, and she had the effect of being as solitary as she was absorbed. Yet on each side of her, all the way down to the curtained arches that terminated the room, there were women who were being women in a way that involved much agitation of the bosom and laughter that came out like the kick of a horse; and men who were being men in a way that involved an incessant lurching roar of joviality, and very often the shying of their plates and goblets across the low table at the grinning old black slaves behind, so that oyster-shells and flasks of wine crashed into wet splinters on the marble floor. But it was true that the child was alone. She drew in the air the tree of gold that lifted apples against a blue background that was like the lamplit night.

A jewelled old hand held back the heavy curtain of the nearest arch. Its rubies caught her glance and, cocking her

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

little head down, she laughed at the bearded old Jew, who stood behind the curtain watching the feast with bright eyes that ran hither and thither like rats, yet came back to smile on the child very kindly. She had liked him always, ever since he brought her to this place. Before that she had lived in a village on the banks of a river, where there was nothing to see but date-palms spiking brazen skies and bright green rice-fields ending suddenly in the heat haze. Not that that mattered much, for she was commonly kept to a mud hut by the harsh voice of a mother of many children. She was standing at the door of that hut, her little body bare but for a frayed loin-cloth with several sore-eyed babies rolling round her, when the shadow of the Jew had fallen on the sand at her feet. She gaped up at the astonishing whiteness of his garments, the astonishing plumpness of his mule, while he surveyed her with eyes on whose profound softness there was laid a superficial hardness, as they lay coins on the eyes of the dead. There had been the clink of gold in the mud hut, her hand had been filled with dates and sweetmeats, and she was flung across his saddle. Then there had been a journey of many days to a town, whose mysteries had hardly been grasped before it began to project in white platforms and terraces into a blue liveliness that made her weep and was called the sea. On that they floated for some days before the mule brought them over the fiery plains to this city set at the mountains' feet. So had she been brought to this house of pleasure, to spend her days thenceforward in learning many musical instruments, in being instructed from *The Book of the Seven and Seventy Delights of Love*.

The old hand dropped the curtain, and the child's gaze wandered. The tree of gold had ceased to amuse, and she thought she would slip down to the court where the fountains splashed, and where one could play all manner of games with the water so long as the old negress with the fan of peacock's feathers was still sleeping. But when the curtain

PLOUGHED FIELDS

fell back and showed new people entering, she was still child enough to gape at them, although she had long ago learned that here new people remained new no longer than the first glinting of their armour in that doorway, but turned at once into just such strutting males, with smiles like a bright slash in the beard, as he to whom the Jew was now so deeply bowing. Yet, when he had pushed past into the banquet-hall and brought his beard down to the plump neck of the gold-haired Jewess from the Levant, and the old pander bowed again to the second newcomer, her eyes grew big and round. A freckled boy stood there, averting a clear young gaze from the Jew's obeisance as though he felt baseness an affront even when it bowed. He stood scowling over the Jew's bent back, his head tremulous with fierce modesty, his hand twitching his short scarlet cloak. Plainly he was near to weeping because the man who had brought him had left him so nakedly alone, but he was seeing the thing through in a gruff and uncommon manly way. Never before had she seen the helmet and breastplate worn by one so near her own age. She longed, so ardently that tears of disappointment gathered foresightedly in her eyes, that he should come and sit by her.

She could not bear to watch what was going to happen, but sat with her head bowed and her eyes on her anklets. But there was a clanking by her side, and the breathing of one who settles himself in comfort, and her heart leapt up in her. "My lord will drink?" she whispered, hoarse with shyness, to the uninspected presence. He shook his head. "My lord will eat?" she quavered. He shook his head again, and there was silence. "But," she invited him, "there are peaches cooled in snow." His brown gaze became wistful, but he shook his head in a passion of stern virility. "No, I don't care for that sort of thing!" The tail of her eye showed her that the Jew spied on them from the curtain, and she felt that for fear of losing his favour she must show

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

that she had listened diligently to the lessons that had so often been read to her from *The Book of the Seven and Seventy Delights of Love*. So she raised her hand to caress the boy's face. But something on his cheekbone stopped it in mid-air. "What's that?" she breathed. He jerked it out with head held high. "That's where a ferret got me. It hung on, and we couldn't get it to let go. One of our swineherds keeps ferrets. This was one of his. It hurt dreadfully, but I didn't mind. But of course the women screamed." He laughed scornfully, but not unkindly. "Oh, you must be very brave," she murmured, and they were once more enclosed by silence.

Darkly withdrawn from them was the Jew, although his eyes were on them, veiled in the infinite remoteness of his great age and his secret race, and when he raised his hand it was as though he beckoned from a cavern. From old obedience and shame at her shyness the child ran to him, and he passed his fingers over her face, with love and with the consciousness that he was handling something precious, while he summoned the young soldier with a gesture whose high solemnity meant nothing but that he knew it the proper note to catch the boy. Then the curtain fell between them and the banquet and an ebony chest gaped at them from an alcove. Good things, said the Jew, had come to him from a journey in the East, and he delved in it. His old hands held high above them a little white statue of a naked boy, and the children's faces, exquisite in attention, as they raised their forefingers to play with the crook of the arm, made his eyes gleam with all the passion of a race that cares for exquisiteness. Then he drew out a box of precious wood full of greyness that looked like dust and smelt like a rose-garden after rain, over which their noses, still snub with childhood, sniffed deliciously for a little.

Laughter came from the hall, and he looked over his shoulder, sighed, and cast about the child's head a scarf of

PLOUGHED FIELDS

many colours. "Take thy young lord into the garden," he said, and put into the boy's hands a box of sweetmeats. The scarlet cloak swaggered, and there was gold flung down magnificently on the ebony chest. The Jew gathered it to his bosom with crooked fingers that were all greed, and raised a face that was all tenderness. "May my young lord buy no baser pleasure."

Never since the beginning of the world was there an afternoon long enough for a child to show its garden to another child. There were the orange-groves, now burnished harshly by the summer and plunderable only here and there where a golden globe had been forgotten by the strippers, and there were the clay hives of the honey bees. There was the marble tank of water, bright with foundered sunshine and strewn with scarlet petals, and overhung by a tree laden down by little green fruits with three stones, which the boy crunched between his teeth as minute by minute he grew a kinder friend. There were the fountains which played tricks and suddenly, as one put foot on the stone flagging to come nearer to their plashing, sent their cold columns down one's body. There were the marble balustrades over which they hung and watched brown boys diving from the roof of the mill below into the river, while the boy envied them and told her what prodigious distances he could swim in those blue lakes to which his own hills fell. High above them in the sky there prowled a thunderstorm like a homeless tiger. The boy looked up to the mountains whence it came and talked sternly of the enemy that lay encamped in those fastnesses. The child shifted her sweetmeat to the other cheek and pondered. So rarely was the war spoken of in this house of pleasure that she had half forgotten that they dwelt in a beleaguered city. "If the enemy came, must you fight?" she asked. "Yes," he cried sturdily. "I must be brave. It is my work. Perhaps I shall die a general much honoured by the people. On his deathbed my father took

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

my hand and said, 'My son, be a good soldier.' And indeed I did not require that, for it is a man's part to be brave and protect his women." And he put a stiff little arm round her waist and led her back to the tank, where they sat and ate more of the little green fruit with three stones, and dipped their hands in the waters and suddenly found them icy with evening. And the sky dripped green light, and a thousand stars opened their eyes, and the night fell. They spoke and, playing no more, sat looking down on the image of their faces which floated in the starlit waters, their hearts aching. When it was quite dark they kissed.

They trembled, and the cold seemed unkind, so they walked up the garden, whose flowers were going grey in the dusk, to the court where the fountains played. The negress with the fan of peacock's feathers had gone, and there were no lights. Paying no heed to the hum of riot from the banquet hall, the soaring of lutes and the screech of laughter, they sat together in the darkness. From the gallery above, one time, there looked down the Jew, holding a taper in his hand. He sent a slave with meat and wine and fruit for them, and came himself when they were eating, noiseless in his red leathern shoes. He brooded over them for a time, pulling his beard, and said, "Surely it was a bad bargain I made, that noon by the river." She whimpered. It was true. Not once had she thought of all the instruction she had had from *The Book of Seven and Seventy Delights of Love*. But he seemed not really angered, and presently bent low and said, "My house is but a casket for you two," and wearily went back to the banquet. They were glad when he had gone, for then they could again choose out the best bits of the food to give one another, and he could tell her of his home. "There is a stone terrace before my house, flanked with pines, which looks to the west, towards this very place. There is the sea and the plains and the mountains, but if a bird could fly straight forward it would come

PLOUGHED FIELDS

here. So every sunset my mother and my sisters go out and stand there, turning their faces towards me." She said, "I have no one who thinks of me like that." He clasped her to him. "Wherever I am, my heart will always turn to you." Her gaze strained at him doubtfully, and his young voice steadied to solemnity. "Always and always, if I live a hundred years!" And after that sleep fell like a curtain between them and their play, and yawning and rubbing their eyes they went up the staircase to find a resting place. On a broad couch in a far room they curled up, warm and relaxed and confident, like sleeping animals.

Broad daylight flashed on her and she sat up, her body beating with the sense of danger. Spears of sunshine were thrust through the high window, but somewhere there were other spears. For there were shrieks and the clanking of metal. She leaped up and clung by her hands to the ledge of the window, drawing herself up till she could look down into the market place. The booths were falling like a house of cards, fine stuffs fell weltering in the dust, men rushed about like eddying surf, and through all the confusion were lances, glittering lances that dipped and came up red. She went back to the boy and shook him. "The enemy has come!" she cried. Before that he had been growling and whimpering like a waking puppy, but when he heard her words he lay quite still for a minute before he rose and sprang to the window. He stiffened as he looked, and turned aside and took up his sword and helmet like a priest assuming his vestments. They ran through corridors and chambers. On their way they passed the Jew, who had taken some tiles out of the wall and was packing bags of gold and preciousness into the hollow space within. He wailed, "Ah, be good children, stay quiet and you will be safe," but again it was as though he beckoned from a cavern. They fled on in their bright path.

She was used to the aspect of the hall after a feast. She

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

did not wonder that the man who had brought the boy to the house of pleasure should now be lying on his back with his face like an over-ripe fruit and a trickle of moisture running from his mouth into beard, and the Jewess should have the claws of crayfish tangled in her golden hair. But the boy was near to weeping when he knelt by his friend and shook him and shouted into his ear, for neither he nor any other of the figures that lay shapeless with pleasure on the filthied floor did anything but grunt bearishly. The boy straightened himself and said, "We are all alone," and forced his voice past a break to add, "so all the glory will be ours." He lifted a wine-stained scabbard and gave her the sword. They waited in silence, facing the curtained arches. He tried to polish his breastplate up to soldier's brightness by rubbing it with his hands, he tried to smooth his crumpled scarlet cloak by stretching it. There was a clangour. The outer doors had been broken down. The shapeless figures on the floor stirred, stood lurchingly, made loose-lipped roars of fear. The boy flung out his hands in loathing. "Not here, with them!" he cried. "Let us go out and meet them. Let's die like soldiers." "Let's die like soldiers," said the child.

They ran out to the head of the staircase. From some place of hiding the Jew wailed softly, "Children, children!" but they paid no heed. The court below was full of strange ruddy men in brassy armour with fleshy lips lifting over large teeth, getting their breath after the breaking down of the door, dragging the hangings down from the wall, shattering the great jars that had come from the East. The boy lifted his sword and sent out a war-cry that winged above them like a bird. A man resting on the balustrade half way up the stairs turned and casually transfixed him with a spear. The boy rolled down six steps and stopped. The child looked down on his dark head, still damp and ruffled from the night. She would have fallen into deep weeping had she not seen

PLOUGHED FIELDS

his ruddy slayer turn his face towards her and lose his indifference and mount the stairs towards her. There was just time to raise the sword that was so heavy for her wrist. She too rolled down six steps, and smiled to feel against her face his fine hair, still damp and ruffled from the night.

Thus did they escape from the city, those two. The city is now ploughed fields. They will never be captured now.

THE SABBATH BREAKER

By I. ZANGWILL

THE moment came near for the Polish centenarian grandmother to die. From the doctor's statement it appeared she had only a bad quarter of an hour to live. Her attack had been sudden, and the grandchildren she loved to scold could not be present.

She had already battled through the great wave of pain, and was drifting beyond the boundaries of her earthly Refuge. The nurses, forgetting the trouble her querulousness and her overweening dietary scruples had cost them, hung over the bed on which the shrivelled entity lay. They did not know she was living again through the one great episode of her life.

Nearly forty years back, when (though already hard upon seventy and a widow) a Polish village was all her horizon, she received a letter. It arrived on the eve of Sabbath on a day of rainy summer. It was from her little boy—her only boy—who kept a country inn seven-and-thirty miles away, and had a family. She opened the letter with feverish anxiety. Her son—her *Kaddish*—was the apple of her eye. The old woman eagerly perused the Hebrew script from right to left. Then weakness overcame her, and she nearly fell.

Imbedded casually enough in the four pages was a passage that stood out for her in letters of blood. "I am not feeling very well lately; the weather is so oppressive and the nights

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THE SABBATH BREAKER

are misty. But it is nothing serious; my digestion is a little out of order, that's all." There were roubles for her in the letter, but she let them fall to the floor unheeded. Panic fear, travelling quicker than the tardy post of those days, had brought rumour of a sudden outbreak of cholera in her son's district. Already alarm for her boy had surged about her heart all day; the letter confirmed her worst apprehensions. Even if the first touch of the cholera-fiend was not actually on him when he wrote, still he was by his own confession in that condition in which the disease takes easiest grip. By this time he was on a bed of sickness—nay, perhaps on his deathbed, if not dead. Even in those days the little grandmother had lived beyond the common span; she had seen many people die, and knew that the Angel of Death does not always go about his work leisurely. In an epidemic his hands are too full to enable him to devote much attention to each case. Maternal instinct tugged at her heartstrings, drawing her towards the boy. The end of the letter seemed impregnated with special omen—"Come and see me soon, dear little mother. I shall be unable to get to see you for some time." Yes, she must go at once—who knew but that it would be the last time she would look upon his face?

But then came a terrible thought to give her pause. The Sabbath was just "in"—a moment ago. Driving, riding, or any manner of journeying was prohibited during the next twenty-four hours. Frantically she reviewed the situation. Religion permitted the violation of the Sabbath on one condition—if life was to be saved. By no stretch of logic could she delude herself into the belief her son's recovery hinged upon her presence—nay, analysing the case with the cruel remorselessness of a scrupulous conscience, she saw his very illness was only a plausible hypothesis. No; to go to him now were beyond question to profane the Sabbath.

And yet, beneath all the reasoning, her conviction that he

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

was sick unto death, her resolve to set out at once, never wavered. After an agonising struggle she compromised. She could not go by cart—that would be to make others work into the bargain, and would, moreover, involve a financial transaction. She must walk! Sinful as it was to transgress the limit of two thousand yards beyond her village—the distance fixed by Rabbinical law—there was no help for it. And of all the forms of travelling, walking was surely the least sinful. The Holy One, blessed be He, would know she did not mean to work; perhaps in His mercy He would make allowance for an old woman who had never profaned His rest-day before.

And so, that very evening, having made a hasty meal, and lodged the precious letter in her bosom, the little grandmother girded up her loins to walk the seven and thirty miles. No staff took she with her, for to carry such came under the Talmudical definition of work. Neither could she carry an umbrella, though it was a season of rain. Mile after mile she strode briskly on, toward that pallid face that lay so far beyond the horizon, and yet ever shone before her eyes like a guiding star. "I am coming, my lamb," she muttered. "The little mother is on the way."

It was a muggy night. The sky, flushed with a weird, hectic glamour, seemed to hang over the earth like a pall. The trees that lined the roadway were shrouded in a draggling vapour. At midnight the mist blotted out the stars. But the little grandmother knew the road ran straight. All night she walked through the forest, fearless as Una, meeting neither man nor beast, though the wolf and the bear haunted its recesses, and snakes lurked in the bushes. But only the innocent squirrels darted across her path. The morning found her spent, and almost lame. But she walked on. Almost half the journey was yet to do.

She had nothing to eat with her; food, too, was an illegal burden, nor could she buy any on the holy day. She said her

THE SABBATH BREAKER

Sabbath-morning prayer walking, hoping God would forgive the disrespect. The recital gave her partial oblivion of her pains. As she passed through a village, the dreadful rumour of cholera was confirmed; it gave wings to her feet for ten minutes, then bodily weakness was stronger than everything else, and she had to lean against the hedges on the outskirts of the village. It was nearly noon. A passing beggar gave her a piece of bread. Fortunately it was unbuttered, so she could eat it with only minor qualms lest it had touched any unclean thing. She resumed her journey, but the rest had only made her feet move more painfully and reluctantly. She would have liked to bathe them in a brook, but that, too, was forbidden. She took the letter from her bosom and perused it, and whipped up her flagging strength with a cry of "Courage, my lamb! the little mother is on the way." Then the leaden clouds melted into sharp lines of rain, which beat into her face, refreshing her for the first few moments, but soon wetting her to the skin, making her sopped garments a heavier burden, and reducing the pathway to mud, that clogged still further her feeble footsteps. In the teeth of the wind and the driving shower she limped on. A fresh anxiety consumed her now—would she have strength to hold out? Every moment her pace lessened, she was moving like a snail. And the slower she went, the more vivid grew her prescience of what awaited her at the journey's end. Would she even hear his dying word? Perhaps—terrible thought!—she would only be in time to look upon his dead face! Mayhap that was how God would punish her for her desecration of the holy day. "Take heart, my lamb!" she wailed. "Do not die yet. The little mother comes."

The rain stopped. The sun came out, hot and fierce, and dried her hands and face, then made them stream again with perspiration. Every inch won was torture now, but the brave feet toiled on. Bruised and swollen and crippled they toiled on. There was a dying voice—very far off yet,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

alas!—that called to her, and as she dragged herself along, she replied, "I am coming, my lamb. Take heart! the little mother is on the way. Courage! I shall look upon thy face, I shall find thee alive."

Once a waggoner observed her plight and offered her a lift, but she shook her head steadfastly. The endless afternoon wore on—she crawled along the forest way, stumbling every now and then from sheer faintness, and tearing her hands and face in the brambles of the roadside. At last the cruel sun waned, and reeking mists rose from the forest pools. And still the long miles stretched away, and still she plodded on, torpid from over-exhaustion, scarcely conscious, and taking each step only because she had taken the preceding. From time to time her lips mumbled, "Take heart, my lamb! I am coming." The Sabbath was "out" ere, broken and bleeding and all but swooning, the little grandmother crawled up to her son's inn, on the border of the forest. Her heart was cold with fatal foreboding. There was none of the usual Saturday-night litter of Polish peasantry about the door. The sound of many voices weirdly intoning a Hebrew hymn floated out into the night. A man in caftan opened the door, and mechanically raised his forefinger to bid her enter without noise. The little grandmother saw into the room behind. Her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren were seated on the floor—the seat of mourners.

"Blessed be the true Judge!" she said, and rent the skirt of her dress. "When did he die?"

"Yesterday. We had to bury him hastily ere the Sabbath came in."

The little grandmother lifted up her quavering voice, and joined the hymn, "I will sing a new song unto Thee, O God; upon a harp of ten strings will I sing praises unto Thee."

THE SABBATH BREAKER

The nurses could not understand what sudden inflow of strength and impulse raised the mummified figure into a sitting posture. The little grandmother thrust a shrivelled claw into her peaked, shrunken bosom and drew out a paper, crumpled and yellow as herself, covered with strange crabbed hieroglyphics whose hue had long since faded. She held it close to her bleared eyes—a beautiful light came into them, and illumined the million-puckered face. The lips moved faintly; “I am coming, my lamb,” she mumbled. “Courage! The little mother is on the way. I shall look on thy face. I shall find thee alive.”

THE BLUE BEADS

By MARY E. MANN

SHE lay all day long on her bed, and often she lay and moaned. She was crippled by rheumatism, and sometimes she moaned because the pain was acute and she could not forbear, but often for a distraction from the monotony of silence, listening to herself as she did so. The only other diversion she had was when Alice, the fifteen years old maid-of-all-work, brought her food at stated periods. The food she was glad to see because it marked the passing of the long hours, more than because she needed to eat. Also because sometimes she could then prevail on Alice to talk.

She had enjoyed a life with the average amount of happiness; she had been young, she always thought she had been pretty—which is as useful as the real thing, when once the prettiness is gone—she had had plenty of friends. But now she was old, ugly, and distorted with pain, and she lived by herself in Acacia Cottage, in the depths of the country, and Alice, her maid-of-all-work, was her only society.

Alice was lumpy, and fat, and red-haired. Sometimes she was attentive to her mistress, and sometimes she neglected her. But it was necessary to put up with Alice, because difficult to find a girl who would endure the loneliness. She was recently from school, too, and sometimes would read to her mistress portions from her prize books, and sometimes she would talk.

The moaning, which was the expression of the sufferer's pain or her boredom, had been unusually noisy one autumn afternoon, and Alice, coming leisurely up the steep stairs to the bedroom, tea-tray in hands, was irritated by it.

THE BLUE BEADS

"That ain't no arthly good your a-carrin' on like that, Miss," she said as, kicking open the door with her foot, she entered. She carried the tray to the big four-posted bedstead, beneath the shade of whose drab moreen curtains lay the shriveled, twisted little old lady who was her mistress. "Your a-groanin' don't make the water bile quicker, nor yet the toast get brown."

She set the tray on the unoccupied side of the bed, and went round to the other side, to lift the old woman higher on her pillows.

"I groan aloud with pain, Alice. Night and day I am in pain."

"'Tis very mel'ncholy for me, that ain't," Alice said. She threw a white woollen shawl over the arched back and shoulders. "I suppose you don't think o' that?" she asked, and the invalid only responded with a shriek of pain, as she tried to raise herself in bed.

"I should wish to be dead if I was you, Miss."

The poor mistress wept a little at that: "I do sometimes long for release," she admitted.

The tea-cup shook in the cramped fingers: "Climb on the bed beside me, and give me my tea, Alice."

So Alice clambered up, and held the cup to the shaking lips; her manipulations were not skilful, and as much of the drab-looking, half cold fluid fell on the sheet as went down the poor throat.

The mistress took one slice of the divided round of buttered toast. Alice, by invitation, ate the other.

"You've got on your new afternoon frock, Alice. You look very nice."

"The one made out o' that old 'un of yours."

"And the nice warm petticoat, Alice?"

"Here it be," said Alice, and pulled up the frock to show it. "What I want next is shoes." She held up one coarse

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

foot in a boot through which the toes were bulging. "These here have seen their best days, Miss."

"If your feet were not so big you could have mine," the mistress said. "I shall not want them any more."

"You won't!" Alice said, and turned her prominent, large blue eyes to stare at the old woman when she whimpered over the thought.

"If you're a good girl, and kind to me, and will stay with me, I'll give you some new boots at Christmas, Alice."

"I'd a sight rather have the blue beads."

"The blue beads?"

"Yes. Out of that little leather box on your dressing-table."

"You're not to interfere with the things in that box, Alice."

"I can't help a-seein' 'em when I'm dustin'. I think they're pretty. They'd go nice with my eyes and my coloured hair. I should like to have 'em."

"You could not possibly wear them, Alice."

"Couldn't I? Why not?"

"They wouldn't be suitable."

"Didn't you never wear them?"

"I wore them. I was a little girl when I wore them. A pretty little, little girl." She laid down the piece of toast she was nibbling and whimpered at the recollection.

"I ain't such a very big one, Miss. Least ways, I ain't old."

"The cases are quite different. What was seemly for me would not be for you. Although I lie here lonely and helpless all day long, I am a lady. My father was a gentleman; and my grandfather before him."

"My gran'father was hanged," Alice said, pleasurably recalling the fact.

The old mistress turned her head on the pillow and looked at the girl beside her, sitting upright on the bed, giving forth that disturbing piece of intelligence as if it were a matter

THE BLUE BEADS

for pride: "You never told me that before, Alice. Is it really true?"

"He were hanged, safe enough," said Alice equably: "And so were my cousin Joe."

"You should certainly have told me!"

"Why? I never give it a thought."

"Do you mean they—*murdered* people, Alice?"

"That they did, Miss. The old chap, he did for two of 'em at once. An old man and woman they was, as lived back of a little shop. He were a woodman, gran'father were, and one day when he was a-passin', he'd got his chopper handy, and he went in and downed 'em both at once."

"Killed them? Really killed them? How horrible, Alice!"

"Bashed both their heads in. They ketched him, through his chopper—and what was on it. The perlice did."

"What a terrible man!"

"I never heard mother say as he were. Mother, she finely took on at his hangin'; and so did my gran'mother."

"And your cousin Joe, Alice?"

"That weren't in these parts. We read it in the paper, else we shouldn't have knowed. He took a little boy into a field and done him in, my cousin Joe did."

"Murdered him? What for?"

"His clo'es, I suppose, and his boots. He'd sold 'em for sixpence when they caught him."

"And he was hanged? Hanged for sixpence?"

"He wanted the sixpence," Alice explained serenely.

The old woman, peering up at the girl beside her with her dim, blear eyes, forgot to moan in the grip of the interest she felt. Her life had been long, and she had known many people, but never one nearly related to murderers before!

"It is a terrible family history!" at length she said. "You must be thankful, Alice, for a better bringing up than they could have had. You must give thanks for your church, and

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

your school, and your teachers, and all the good influences which have been brought to bear upon your life."

"Yes," said Alice.

"And if I were you I would not mention to anyone else in the village that story. It might tell against you in people's minds."

"I don't see that. I'm not likely to down anyone with a chopper, like gran'father, nor yet to strangle a little boy with a boot-lace like my cousin Joe."

"But these things tell against a person. Take my advice and do not speak of them."

"May I have the blue beads to wear when I go to chech, come Sunday?"

"My blue beads? No, certainly not. And get off the bed, Alice. I wish to be kind to you, and to allow you to talk to me; but you are not to take liberties."

Her mistress spared Alice to go to church on Sunday afternoons, and from one week to the next the old lady dreaded that couple of hours when she found herself shut into the house alone. Alice would come into the bedroom to display herself in her short black frock and her long black jacket, her great hands and wrists emerging bare from the sleeves. She wore her large green straw hat pushed to the back of her head, exposing all her copper-coloured hair combed in straight thick bands down her soap polished face; she always blacked that portion of her stocking which showed through her broken shoes.

"I'm now a-goin', Miss," she would announce in tones of joyful anticipation; and having walked across the room to make a survey of herself in the long plate glass of the wardrobe, would depart, lumbering down the stairs to let herself out, and turn the key noisily in the lock; a sound full of terror to the lonely old woman, moaning upon her bed.

Alice had not been many Sundays in the place, and so far had not been successful in attracting to herself one of

THE BLUE BEADS

the hobble-de-hoys who hung about the four cross-ways by the village school, or waited for the emerging congregation at the church gate. But on this auspicious afternoon, when the yellow leaves from the lime-trees by the church wall fluttered slowly through the heavy air to find a resting place upon the nameless graves, when the sun beyond the fresh ploughed fields was sinking a dull red globe in a sullen sky and a white mist hovered over the wet meadows, and hid on all sides the distant prospects, a youth did accost Alice as she issued from the churchyard gate.

"What fine blue beads we've got!" he said and put out a clumsy finger and thumb, pretending to grab the necklace at Alice's throat.

He expected to be told "to git along," to "shut his ugly mug for fear the top of his hid would fall off," or such like familiar witticisms for his pains; but Alice had not longed each Sunday afternoon for a young man to walk with to rebuff him so.

"They're pretty, aren't they? Do you like 'em, really?" she asked, and grinned up delightedly into his sheep-face.

"They're same colour as my eyes, and go wi' my hair. 'Tha's why I wear 'em," she explained.

"You wasn't a-wearin' of 'em last Sunday. I seen ye las' Sunday and the Sunday afore."

"Why didn't you speak to me, then? I hadn't got no one to walk with."

"I was a-walkin' along of Tatty Chivers, what was house-maid down at Potters'. She's left her place, Tatty have."

"You may walk along of me, if you like."

"I don't know as I keer to."

"You jolly well will when you've tried it. I had a young chap to walk with, afore I come here. You're the first I have happed with, since."

With a little more pressure Sheep-face put himself along-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

side, and where Alice liked to take him for her constitutional allowed himself to be dragged.

They walked beneath the dripping trees along the road, meeting other couples as happily mated as they. Alice cheeked them as they passed. She was supremely blest. Her reproach was taken away; she was as good as any of them—she had a young man to walk with! They crawled between wet hedges down muddy lanes, they stood still to look at nothing over gates; and by this time the arm of Sheep-face was around that substantial waist of Alice.

When Alice reached home she was an hour later than her allotted time: "I don't keer if I am!" Alice said, and put out her tongue at the white face of the kitchen clock which she felt to be accusing her. "There'll be a hullabaloo!" she promised herself, knowing that her mistress should long ago have had her tea. She got it ready in a hurry, stuffing slabs of bread and butter and chunks of cake into her mouth as she did so; for she was hungry; making love to Sheep-face had been an exhausting exercise.

"Now for a wiggin'! And if she ask where I've been and what I've been a' doin' she'll hear the truth, 'ont she!" she said, with her tongue in her cheek, as, tray in hand, she kicked open the bedroom door.

But not a question on the subject was put to her, the mistress being full of another matter:

"Alice, where are the blue beads that were in the leather box on the dressing-table?"

"The blue beads? What them you wore when you was a little girl, Miss?"

"Where are they?"

"Why, where should they be but in the leather box on your dressin'-table, still?"

"They are not there. I crawled out of bed to look for them. They are not there."

Alice put down the tray upon the side of the bed, and

THE BLUE BEADS

crossed to the dressing-table. The beads were clutched in her hand. It was easy, her back to the bed, to slip them into the box: "Finely you must have looked, Miss!" and turning round, box in hand, she held up the beads for inspection.

"Bring them to me." She took them eagerly in her stiffened fingers; they were warm from the hot hand that had held them.

The old woman's eyes turned on the girl were eloquent of accusation and reproach. Yet not a word of either dared she speak. She was so helpless and alone. It was so difficult to find a girl to "do" for her.

"I wore the beads when I was a little girl," she said; "I'll wear them now while I live. They shall be put with me into the coffin."

She began to cry miserably as she always did at the thought of her own demise. She cried into her tea-cup. The three front teeth which were all that remained to her rattled against the brim; her slice of bread and butter was flavoured with her salt tears; but she contrived to keep the string of beads still safely clutched in her hand; and when Alice saw them again they showed their alluring bird's egg blue through the lace of the night-gown around the shrivelled, brown throat.

Alice sulked for two days. It was very uncomfortable for the mistress when the maid sulked. The meals were hardly any break in the blankness of the day if Alice, carrying them in, would only answer her anxious attempts at conversation with monosyllables. On the third day the baker was to call. Little tit-bits of interest which Alice gleaned from him—the number of loaves they took at the Rectory, the interesting fact that down at Potters' he now left none but Standard loaves, his remarks on the weather, and the state of his invalid wife's health—she carefully retailed, when in a

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

good temper, to her mistress upstairs. So that "Baker's day" was a red letter day at Acacia Cottage.

Was Alice going to sulk through it? The old lady heard the wheels of the baker's cart stop at the gate, heard the loud opening of the door, heard his voice rumbling on, beneath her window. She waited for Alice to come, and waited in vain. Then she rang her bell.

"I should like a glass of milk, Alice."

"'Tisn't your time for it, Miss."

"All the same, I should like it."

From the look that Alice turned on her, from the sound of her footsteps as she departed, the poor mistress knew the maid still sulked.

She felt for the beads beneath her night-gown, caressing them with a distorted, shaking hand. She had worn them when she was a little girl, dressed by her mother. At her parties, at the pantomime, at all the little gala functions of her childhood, she had worn her pretty pale blue beads!

And Alice! Ugly, slipshod Alice, with her great coarse throat!

"Has the baker been?" she asked when the milk was brought. "Aren't you going to tell me what he said?" the question came with a sob of reproach.

"No," said Alice.

"You are not being kind to me as you promised, Alice. You are being cruel to me."

Alice turned to go away.

"Alice!" Alice stopped short. "Alice, I've just been thinking—since you like them so much—I'll—I'll leave you my blue beads when I die." The words were accompanied by a burst of weeping.

"Will you, Miss?" Alice came eagerly back to the bed. "I'd like to have 'em finely. Perhaps you'd better put it down in writin', Miss, if you wouldn't mind."

All Alice's good humour was back. The baker had been

THE BLUE BEADS

extra communicative. All kinds of interesting remarks he had made. The maid-of-all-work neglected her work downstairs to report them, sitting on the side of her mistress's bed. And even when at length she went she quickly returned, bringing pen and ink and paper. Holding the poor mistress in a sitting posture with her arm around her she helped her to scrawl the few words, "My blue beads are for Alice," and to sign her name.

But on the next Sunday Alice must go to church without the beads.

At the church gate was Sheep-face, sure enough, but with no eyes for her. A new housemaid from Potters' had appeared, wearing a long white scarf whose two ends fell over her shoulders at the back; and these ends Sheep-face held, and with loud guffaws drove the young lady in front of him.

Alice called after the pair certain expressions not worth recording. But the new housemaid, entering into the spirit of the joke, began to frisk and curvet like a horse; and Sheep-face, yelling encouragement, gambolled after her. The other girls, in service, and younger girls, "not out yet," of her own class, all had attendant swains. No one looked at Alice, in her long black jacket with only the frill of white lace round her great red throat.

Standing unnoticed beneath the lime-trees she watched the last couple away. Then she turned, and running, swiftly as bad boots and clumsy movements would allow, made her way to a village four miles off where her mother, a widow, lived, keeping house for her brother who was an under-keeper.

By lane and sheep-walk and meadow-path she went by a short cut that she knew; across fields, knee deep in wet turnip tops, over fresh-ploughed lands in which she sank to her ankles, plunging heavily along, not feeling the wear-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

ness of the way because of her ardour to achieve the goal she had in view.

But that goal was not her mother's cottage. She passed the back of it, not giving it a look or a thought, and made her way to a meadow, near by. A meadow bordered on two sides by a thick plantation, where in the spring-time she had watched her brother at work; where the young pheasants had been reared.

The keepers' wooden hut stood there still, its wheels sunk in the long lush grass. Its interior was filled with half-emptied sacks, with rusty traps, with bags of poisoned meal for the benefit of the rats. With none of these familiar objects had Alice business now.

Along one side of the hut, high up against the roof, ran a little shelf where stood several empty bottles, and one or two dirty jars covered with dust and cobwebs. One summer evening, Alice had watched her brother putting poison into the wasps' nests in banks and hollow trees. The wasps had been a pest that year. Alice knew exactly which jar it was—a piece of rag tied over its mouth—she had been forbidden to take it in her hand, for fear of accident. She took it in her hand now, and holding it beneath her jacket carried it back to Acacia Cottage.

Before she went to bed that night, she wrote a letter. She was fluent with her pen, having been reckoned a good scholar at the village school.

"My dear Swetehart," she wrote, "You was crule to me today. Was you ashamed I had no long-tailed scarf for you to drive me by. I thort you and her did look a fool. It wor diffrent when I wor my blue Bedes. Will you wate for me nex Sunday at the chech gate and I will ware them agin so as you ar not ashamed to walk along of me. You shall have a swete kiss afore we part like we done afore. Your loveing swetehart, Alice."

Then followed numerous noughts and crosses to repre-

THE BLUE BEADS

sent love and kisses, and a "P. S. Look out for the Blue bedes."

On the Saturday morning it happened that the doctor paid a visit to his incurable old patient. He took the maid-of-all-work aside when he came downstairs and warned her that her mistress was losing ground.

"I find her heart much feebler," he said. "You must be very attentive, and never leave her for long. She might die at any moment."

Alice opened wide her prominent blue eyes with their sand-coloured fringes: "Do you think she'll die afore to-morrow?" she asked.

It was impossible to say. He left some medicine to be given on emergency. Her heart was in such a condition that at any minute it might stop. She must not be left at night. Alice must make up a bed in the same room.

Alice did so, and slept like a top, although the poor old woman moaned through the whole night. Just before dawn, however, the mistress fell asleep, and awoke to find the maid in her coarse night-gown standing by the bedside, her red, short hair standing off stiffly from her face and shoulders.

"Why do you look at me like that?" the startled woman asked; for Alice's face was within an inch of her own.

"I thought you wasn't goin' to wake no more," Alice said. "You looked for all the world as if you was dead."

The sick woman cried at that, and sent Alice to dress, and told her never again to hold her face so close to her own, to frighten her so.

At dinner-time she had revived in courage, and ate a tiny bit of the chicken Alice had cooked for her, it being Sunday, and a spoonful of the sago pudding.

"You're going to church, Alice?"

Alice was already dressed; all but the green hat and the jacket.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"You won't be late, Alice! You won't leave me alone long, today?"

Alice wasn't "a-goin' just yet," she reassured her. Not till her missus had drunk the physic the doctor had given her. Nice physic it were, he had said, and would keep her quiet till Alice came home.

It did keep her quiet, after quite a short time. Very quiet. So quiet, that Alice, without much trouble, and meeting with no resistance could take the blue beads from beneath the lace of the night-gown and fasten them about her own throat. . . .

Sheep-face, in anticipation no doubt of the promised sweet kiss, was at the church gate after service. Alice saw him as she issued with the rest from the church porch, waiting beneath the now leafless limes. She fought her way through the little crowd in the churchyard porch to get ahead of the new housemaid from Potters' with the long white scarf.

"I ha' got on my blue beads," Alice told him, drawing his attention to the ornament. "They're mine. My missus left 'em to me in a will. And she's dead."

FEAR

By CATHERINE WELLS

ON the Kentish coast between Folkestone and Dover there is a stretch of stunted trees and thickly tangled bushes and undergrowth between the sea and the receded cliffs, a strip of picturesque desolation some half mile broad and five miles long. In high summer the nearer end towards Folkestone is the resort of happy holiday parties, picnicking all about a tea and ginger beer shanty; further on its solitudes, wilder and more beautiful, are seldom disturbed. The high road to Dover lies distantly up and away over the top of the cliffs, and such few houses as there are on that road stand remotely back, as if they shrink from the approach of the treacherous cliff edge that creeps ever nearer to them. Here and there the sheer white fall of the cliff is broken by a weedy slope down which a scrambling path traces a thin line, and beneath comes that stretch of tumbled land-slidden ground, its little hills and valleys richly netted with rose-briars and brambles, wayfaring tree and hawthorn, and carpeted with short grass all beset with yellow rock roses and violets and a hundred other flowers.

There, close to the sea, in a grassy hollow that spread itself to the hot summer sun, lay a woman face downward to the ground, and sobbed. Her expensive, pretty muslin dress showed little rents here and there where it had been caught by unheeded brambles. And she sobbed because she had come into that lonely and beautiful place to take her life into her hands and end it and die.

She had been sitting there on the grass a long while, it seemed to her, trying to think, for the last of so many times,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

what other thing she could possibly do. But no new light came to her. Her life seemed all too tangled now for new beginnings, and she herself too weary to imagine any. Her husband would never forgive her when he knew, and—so went her tired mind again over the old trodden track—nothing could stop his knowing, even if he did not know already. She thought it certain that he did know already. Why else should he have got leave and be coming home again so soon?

She stared upon the sea that lay before her, calm and flat like a lake surface, its edge slapping gently on the grey, clayish sand. Silvery pale blue with lights and shades like satin, and further out it was streaked with azure bands. Far on the horizon hung the sails of the fishing fleet, and it was so still about her that there seemed no nearer living thing.

She could not meet her husband, passionate, noisy, raging with anger as he would be. It was the sick fear of him that had driven her away here. He must be already in the house. She could imagine, and it made her tremble, his heavy tread upstairs, the flung open doors, the harsh loud demands for her. Even if she had stayed to meet him and brave it out with what courage she could, what good would it have been? He would never have let her speak one word of excuse or explanation; he would shout at her and curse, and fling her at last out of his house as he would a dead flower from his coat. What could she be but helpless before a creature so fixed and immutable? Why was there never a human being who could understand the trouble and the happiness and the misery, and the muddle and the lies that had netted about her? She wanted to cry, cry to that wise and kindly soul like a child that is hurt, and be comforted and loved and set on her feet to try again. And instead of that it seemed to her as if an invisible hand had thrust her down a narrow passage of consequences, impelling her by the whispered fear of the terror behind, till she had come at last to a door,

FEAR

a way out, the only way out, that escape whose key was in the little chemist's bottle in her pocket. The memory of it there stung her with fear; in it she saw the terror that had followed her re-embodied, before her now instead of behind her, crouched to spring and grip and shake the pulsating life out of her young and beautiful body.

She sat and gazed at the blue sea, and tried to make it seem real to herself that she would presently lie there dead, growing colder and stiff. In a few moments it might be, if she chose. In a few hours it would have to be. She felt suddenly very lonely. For a long time now she had sat there and seen no one. About an hour since a straggling line of black dots had appeared over the headland on the Folkestone side, schoolboys, they were, hunting the bay for fossils under the energetic direction of an explanatory master. They had come near enough for her to hear their shouts and the deeper voice of their tutor, and then they had turned back again, and disappeared at last in twos and threes beyond the headland. They left her the lonelier for having come and gone. Indeed, she felt a little frightened at seeing so measured out to her eye by those remote black dots, how much she was alone. A rustle in the grass above, the dart of a bird back to its hidden nest, made her start; and then she turned and watched for some time the business-like coming and going of a pair of blue tits among the pale gold dried grass stems that fringed against the sky; patiently and lovingly attendant they were upon a faintly clamorous invisible cheeping. It was their happy domesticity that struck to her heart, and set her sobbing, a sobbing that became violent and uncontrolled. And afterwards she lay still.

She sat up at last, and then stood up with the thought of going down to the edge of the satin-surfaced sea. But as she turned she saw about a quarter of a mile away on a little hillock among the bushes, the slouching figure of a man who seemed to look at her.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Before she recognised its unlikeness she had an instant's panic fear that it might be her husband. She turned from the sea and walked on among the bushes, the softly-bred woman's fear of tramps instinctively setting her to put distance between herself and that dubious figure. She walked on quickly for about half a mile, among the stunted trees and up and down slopes, having lost sight of the man almost at once, and then she stopped and sat again upon the grass.

She would have to do it soon; she would have to do it soon. That invisible hand was pressing her hardly now against the very door itself. The afternoon had grown late, and the shadows had lengthened till those of a gorse bush three yards away lay across her feet. The blue was paling out of the sea before a tinge of yellow that grew warmer. The sea was swelling up, and flowing silently nearer with the turned tide. A faint chill crept into the air. It would have to be done soon.

She slipped her hand into her pocket, and felt the cool smooth glass of the little bottle there between her fingers. Slowly she drew it out and held it in her lap, and looked at it. The thing she had to do became to her as queer and meaningless, as unreasonably stupid, as something that happens in a dream.

She turned as if to look once more upon all the beauty that was about her, and with a clutch of terror at her heart saw the ill-conditioned figure she had seen before, looking at her and coming towards her, less than a hundred yards away.

With a rush came Fear upon her, and possessed her. She had a watch upon her wrist that glittered, shining trinkets about her neck. She got up hastily, turned some high bushes, and frankly began to run, running into the thicker undergrowth, and bending where the trees fell away, lest her head should show. She ran inland towards the cliff and doubled back, her heart thumping heavily with fear, threading

FEAR

through a maze of little tracks, through tiny woods, by a deep-lying pool of black and green stagnant water, struggling with brambles that caught and tore at her, pressed by one thought, to escape the horror of that stealthy pursuer. Thicker grew the trees, and thicker.

She stopped at last in a little opening among them, a circle of thin grass and bracken surrounded so completely by high bushes and small trees that she could hardly see from where she had stepped into the place. She was hot and panting, and the noisy beating of her heart against her breast left her breathless. But here was safe hiding. She sank down upon the grass.

Her hand still clutched upon the little bottle. As her breath grew quiet she saw it there, and sat and gazed at it, helplessly, in a state of mind that was not thought, but only a dull pain. Twilight grew upon her. A light wind stirred; she shivered. Ah! night was coming and the cold; cold and solitude and the dark; presently she would grow hungry, and the world that had ever held her so caressingly in its lap would lash her with the whip of elementary human needs. That waited for her here, and over there waited her home—her home and her husband. With a low shuddering cry she pulled the stopper from the little bottle, shut her eyes in anguish, and pushed it against her mouth and swallowed.

It dropped out of her hand. For an instant that seemed long she thought nothing was going to happen to her. Everything was suddenly without sound. Then came a spasm at her heart more terrible in its instant pain than anything she had ever imagined. Without knowing it she fell back upon the ground, and the bushes and patch of sky before her grew small in her vision and very distant, then rushed back upon her and swayed and swayed.

Then she saw, and the sight glazed her eyes in horror, the bushes part before her, and from among them looked out a cunning, evil face.

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO, MELODIOUS VISION AND THE DRAGON

By ERNEST BRAMAH

AFTER Chang Tao had reached the age of manhood his grandfather took him aside one day and spoke of a certain matter, speaking as a philosopher whose mind has at length overflowed.

"Behold!" he said, when they were at a discreet distance aside, "your years are now thus and thus, but there are still empty chairs where there should be occupied cradles in your inner chamber, and the only upraised voice heard in this spacious residence is that of your esteemed father repeating the Analects. The prolific portion of the tree of our illustrious House consists of its roots; its existence onwards narrows down to a single branch which as yet has put forth no blossoms."

"The loftiest tower rises from the ground," remarked Chang Tao evasively, not wishing to implicate himself on either side as yet.

"Doubtless; and as an obedient son it is commendable that you should close your ears, but as a discriminating father there is no reason why I should not open my mouth," continued the venerable Chang in a voice from which every sympathetic modulation was withdrawn. "It is admittedly a meritorious resolve to devote one's existence to explaining

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

the meaning of a single obscure passage of one of the Odes, but if the detachment necessary to the achievement results in a hitherto carefully preserved line coming to an incapable end, it would have been more satisfactory to the dependent shades of our revered ancestors that the one in question should have collected street garbage rather than literary instances, or turned somersaults in place of the pages of the Classics, had he but given his first care to providing you with a wife and thereby safeguarding our unbroken continuity."

"My father is all-wise," ventured Chang Tao dutifully, but observing the nature of the other's expression he hastened to add considerably, "but my father's father is even wiser."

"Inevitably," assented the one referred to; "not merely because he is the more mature by a generation, but also in that he is thereby nearer to the inspired ancients in whom the Cardinal Principles reside."

"Yet, assuredly, there must be occasional exceptions to this rule of progressive deterioration?" suggested Chang Tao, feeling that the process was not without a definite application to himself.

"Not in our pure and orthodox line," replied the other person firmly. "To suggest otherwise is to admit the possibility of a son being the superior of his own father, and to what a discordant state of things would that contention lead! However immaturely you may think at present, you will see the position at its true angle when you have sons of your own."

"The contingency is not an overhanging one," said Chang Tao. "On the last occasion when I reminded my venerated father of my age and unmarried state, he remarked that, whether he looked backwards or forwards, extinction seemed to be the kindest destiny to which our House could be subjected."

"Originality, carried to the length of eccentricity, is a

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

censurable accomplishment in one of official rank," remarked the elder Chang coldly. "Plainly it is time that I should lengthen the authority of my own arm very perceptibly. If a father is so neglectful of his duty, it is fitting that a grandfather should supply his place. This person will himself procure a bride for you without delay."

"The function might perhaps seem an unusual one," suggested Chang Tao, who secretly feared the outcome of an enterprise conducted under these auspices.

"So, admittedly, are the circumstances. What suitable maiden suggests herself to your doubtless better-informed mind? Is there one of the house of Tung?"

"There are eleven," replied Chang Tao, with a gesture of despair, "all reputed to be untiring with their needle, skilled in the frugal manipulation of cold rice, devout, discreet in the lines of their attire, and so sombre of feature as to be collectively known to the available manhood of the city as the Terror that Lurks for the Unwary. Suffer not your discriminating footsteps to pause before that house, O father of my father! Now had you spoken of Golden Eyebrows, daughter of Kuo Wang——"

"It would be as well to open a paper umbrella in a thunder-storm as to seek profit from an alliance with Kuo Wang. Crafty and ambitious, he is already deep in questionable adventures, and high as he carries his head at present, there will assuredly come a day when Kuo Wang will appear in public with his feet held even higher than his crown."

"The rod!" exclaimed Chang Tao in astonishment. "Can it really be that one who is so invariably polite to me is not in every way immaculate?"

"Either bamboo will greet his feet or hemp adorn his neck," persisted the other, with a significant movement of his hands in the proximity of his throat. "Walk backwards in the direction of that house, son of my son. Is there not

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

one Ning of the worthy line of Lo, dwelling beneath the emblem of a Sprouting Aloe?"

"Truly," agreed the youth; "but at an early age she came under the malign influence of a spectral vampire, and in order to deceive the creature she was adopted to the navigable portion of the river here, and being announced as having Passed Above was henceforth regarded as a red mullet."

"Yet in what detail does that deter you?" inquired Chang, for the nature of his grandson's expression betrayed an acute absence of enthusiasm towards the maiden thus concerned.

"Perchance the vampire was not deceived after all. In any case this person dislikes red mullet," replied the youth indifferently.

The venerable shook his head reprovingly.

"It is imprudent to be fanciful in matters of business," he remarked. "Lo Chiu, her father, is certainly the possessor of many bars of silver, and, as it is truly written: 'With wealth one may command demons; without it one cannot summon even a slave.'"

"It is also said, 'When the tree is full the doubtful fruit remains upon the branch,'" retorted Chang Tao. "Are not maidens in this city as the sand upon a broad seashore? If one opens and closes one's hand suddenly out in the Ways on a dark night, the chances are that three or four will be grasped. A stone cast at a venture——"

"Peace!" interrupted the elder. "Witlets spoke thus even in the days of this person's remote youth—only the virtuous did not then open and close their hands suddenly in the Ways on dark nights. Is aught reported of the inner affairs of Shen Yi, a rich philosopher who dwells somewhat remotely on the Stone Path, out beyond the Seven Terraced Bridge?"

Chang Tao looked up with a sharply awakening interest.

"It is well not to forget that one," he replied. "He is spoken of as courteous but reserved, in that he drinks tea

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

with few though his position is assured. Is not his house that which fronts on a summer-seat domed with red copper?"

"It is the same," agreed the other. "Speak on."

"What I recall is meagre and destitute of point. Nevertheless, it so chanced that some time ago this person was proceeding along the further Stone Path when an aged female mendicant, seated by the wayside, besought his charity. Struck by her destitute appearance he bestowed upon her a few unserviceable broken cash, such as one retains for the indigent, together with an appropriate blessing, when the hag changed abruptly into the appearance of a young and alluring maiden, who smilingly extended to this one her staff, which had meanwhile become a graceful branch of flowering lotus. The manifestation was not sustained, however, for as he who is relating the incident would have received the proffered flower he found that his hand was closing on the neck of an expectant serpent, which held in its mouth an agate charm. The damsel had likewise altered, imperceptibly merging into the form of an overhanging fig-tree, among whose roots the serpent twined itself. When this person would have eaten one of the ripe fruit of the tree he found that the skin was filled with a bitter dust, whereupon he withdrew, convinced that no ultimate profit was likely to result from the encounter. His departure was accompanied by the sound of laughter, mocking yet more melodious than a carillon of silver gongs hung in a porcelain tower, which seemed to proceed from the summer-seat domed with red copper."

"Some omen doubtless lay within the meeting," said the elder Chang. "Had you but revealed the happening fully on your return, capable geomancers might have been consulted. In this matter you have fallen short."

"It is admittedly easier to rule a kingdom than to control one's thoughts," confessed Chang Tao frankly. "A great storm of wind met this person on his way back, and when

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

he had passed through it, all recollection of the incident had, for the time, been magically blown from his mind."

"It is now too late to question the augurs. But in the face of so involved a portent it would be well to avert all thought from Melodious Vision, wealthy Shen Yi's incredibly attractive daughter."

"It is unwise to be captious in affairs of negotiation," remarked the young man thoughtfully. "Is the smile of the one referred to such that at the vision of it the internal organs of an ordinary person begin to clash together, beyond the power of all control?"

"Not in the case of the one who is speaking," replied the grandfather of Chang Tao, "but a very illustrious poet, whom Shen Yi charitably employed about his pig-yard, certainly described it as a ripple on the surface of a dark lake of wine, when the moon reveals the hidden pearls beneath; and after secretly observing the unstudied grace of her movements, the most celebrated picture-maker of the province burned the implements of his craft, and began life anew as a trainer of performing elephants. But when maidens are as numerous as the grains of sand——"

"Esteemed," interposed Chang Tao, with smooth determination, "wisdom lurks in the saying, 'He who considers everything decides nothing.' Already this person has spent an unprofitable score of years through having no choice in the matter; at this rate he will spend another score through having too much. Your timely word shall be his beacon. Neither the disadvantage of Shen Yi's oppressive wealth nor the inconvenience of Melodious Vision's excessive beauty shall deter him from striving to fulfil your delicately expressed wish."

"Yet," objected the elder Chang, by no means gladdened at having the decision thus abruptly lifted from his mouth, "so far, only a partially formed project——"

"To a thoroughly dutiful grandson half a word from your

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

benevolent lips carries further than a full-throated command from a less revered authority."

"Perchance. This person's feet, however, are not liable to a similar acceleration and a period of adequate consideration must intervene before they are definitely moving in the direction of Shen Yi's mansion. 'Where the road bends abruptly take short steps,' Chang Tao."

"The necessity will be lifted from your venerable shoulders, revered," replied Chang Tao firmly. "Fortified by your approving choice, this person will himself confront Shen Yi's doubtful countenance, and that same bend in the road will be taken at a very sharp angle and upon a single foot."

"In person! It is opposed to the Usages!" exclaimed the venerable; and at the contemplation of so undignified a course his voice prudently withdrew itself, though his mouth continued to open and close for a further period.

"'As the mountains rise, so the river winds,'" replied Chang Tao, and with unquenchable deference he added respectfully as he took his leave, "Fear not, eminence; you will yet remain to see five generations of stalwart he-children, all pressing forward to worship your imperishable memory."

In such a manner Chang Tao set forth to defy the Usages and—if perchance it might be—to speak to Shen Yi face to face of Melodious Vision. Yet in this it may be that the youth was not so much hopeful of success by his own efforts as that he was certain of failure by the elder Chang's. And in the latter case the person in question might then irrevocably contract him to a maiden of the house of Tung, or to another equally forbidding. Not inaptly is it written: "To escape from fire men will plunge into boiling water."

Nevertheless, along the Stone Path many doubts and disturbances arose within Chang Tao's mind. It was not in this manner that men of weight and dignity sought wives. Even if Shen Yi graciously overlooked the absence of polite formality, would not the romantic imagination of Melodious

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

Vision be distressed when she learned that she had been approached with so indelicate an absence of ceremony? "Here, again," said Chang Tao's self-reproach accusingly, "you have, as usual, gone on in advance both of your feet and of your head. 'It is one thing to ignore the Rites: it is quite another to expect the gods to ignore the Penalties.' Assuredly you will suffer for it."

It was at this point that Chang Tao was approached by one who had noted his coming from afar, and had awaited him, for passers-by were sparse and remote.

"Prosperity attend your opportune footsteps," said the stranger respectfully. "A misbegotten goat-track enticed this person from his appointed line by the elusive semblance of an avoided li. Is there, within your enlightened knowledge, the house of one Shen Yi, who makes a feast today, positioned about this inauspicious region? It is further described as fronting on a summer-seat domed with red copper."

"There is such a house as you describe, at no great distance to the west," replied Chang Tao. "But that he marks the day with music had not reached these superficial ears."

"It is but among those of his inner chamber, this being the name-day of one whom he would honour in a refined and at the same time inexpensive manner. To that end am I bidden."

"Of what does your incomparable exhibition consist?" inquired Chang Tao.

"Of a variety of quite commonplace efforts. It is entitled 'Half-a-gong-stroke among the No-realities; or Gravity-removing devoid of Inelegance.' Thus, borrowing the neck-scarf of the most dignified-looking among the lesser ones assembled I will at once discover among its folds the unsuspected presence of a family of tortoises; from all parts of the person of the roundest-bodied mandarin available I will control the appearance of an inexhaustible stream of copper cash, and beneath the scrutinising eyes of all a bunch of

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

paper chrysanthemums will change into the similitude of a crystal bowl in whose clear depth a company of gold and silver carp glide from side to side."

"These things are well enough for the immature, and the sight of an unnaturally stout official having an interminable succession of white rabbits produced from the various recesses of his waistcloth admittedly melts the austerity of the superficial of both sexes. But can you, beneath the undeceptive light of day, turn a sere and unattractive hag into the substantial image of a young and beguiling maiden, and by a further complexity into a fruitful fig-tree; or induce a serpent so far to forsake its natural instincts as to poise on the extremity of its tail and hold a charm within its mouth?"

"None of these things lies within my admitted powers," confessed the stranger. "To what end does your gracious inquiry tend?"

"It is in the nature of a warning, for within the shadow of the house you seek manifestations such as I describe pass almost without remark. Indeed it is not unlikely that while in the act of displaying your engaging but simple skill you may find yourself transformed into a chameleon or saddled with the necessity of finishing your gravity-removing entertainment under the outward form of a Manchurian ape."

"Alas!" exclaimed the other. "The eleventh of the moon was ever this person's unlucky day, and he would have done well to be warned by a dream in which he saw an unsuspecting kid walk into the mouth of a voracious tiger."

"Undoubtedly the tiger was an allusion to the dangers awaiting you, but it is not yet too late for you to prove that you are no kid," counselled Chang Tao. "Take this piece of silver so that the enterprise of the day may not have been unfruitful and depart with all speed on a homeward path. He who speaks is going westward, and at the lattice

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

of Shen Yi he will not fail to leave a sufficient excuse for your non-appearance."

"Your voice has the compelling ring of authority, beneficence," replied the stranger gratefully. "The obscure name of the one who prostrates himself is Wo, that of his degraded father being Weh. For this service he binds his ghost to attend your ghost through three cycles of time in the After."

"It is remitted," said Chang Tao generously, as he resumed his way. "May the path be flattened before your weary feet."

Thus, unsought as it were, there was placed within Chang Tao's grasp a staff that might haply bear his weight into the very presence of Melodious Vision herself. The exact strategy of the undertaking did not clearly reveal itself, but "When fully ripe the fruit falls of its own accord," and Chang Tao was content to leave such detail to the guiding spirits of his destinies. As he approached the outer door he sang cheerful ballads of heroic doings, partly because he was glad, but also to reassure himself.

"One whom he expects awaits," he announced to the keeper of the gate. "The name of Wo, the son of Weh, should suffice."

"It does not," replied the keeper, swinging his roomy sleeve specifically. "So far it has an empty, short-stopping sound. It lacks sparkle; it has no metallic ring. . . . He sleeps."

"Doubtless the sound of these may awaken him," said Chang Tao, shaking out a score of cash.

"Pass in, munificence. Already his expectant eyes rebuke the unopen door."

Although he had been in a measure prepared by Wo, Chang Tao was surprised to find that three persons alone occupied the chamber to which he was conducted. Two of these were Shen Yi and a trusted slave; at the sight of the third Chang Tao's face grew very red and the deficiencies

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

of his various attributes began to fill his mind with dark forebodings, for this was Melodious Vision, and no man could look upon her without her splendour engulfing his imagination. No record of her pearly beauty is preserved beyond a scattered phrase or two; for the poets and minstrels of the age all burned what they had written, in despair at the inadequacy of words. Yet it remains that whatever a man looked for, that he found, and the measure of his requirement was not stinted.

"Greeting," said Shen Yi, with easy-going courtesy. He was a more meagre man than Chang Tao had experienced, his face not subtle, and his manner restrained rather than oppressive. "You have come on a long and winding path; have you taken your rice?"

"Nothing remains lacking," replied Chang Tao, his eyes again elsewhere. "Command your slave, Excellence."

"In what particular direction do your agreeable powers of leisure-beguiling extend?"

So far Chang Tao had left the full consideration of this inevitable detail to the inspiration of the moment, but when the moment came the prompting spirits did not disclose themselves. His hesitation became more involved under the expression of gathering enlightenment that began to appear in Melodious Vision's eyes.

"An indifferent store of badly sung ballads," he was constrained to reply at length, "and—perchance—a threadbare assortment of involved questions and replies."

"Was it your harmonious voice that we were privileged to hear raised beneath our ill-fitting window a brief space ago?" inquired Shen Yi.

"Admittedly at the sight of this noble palace I was impelled to put my presumptuous gladness into song."

"Then let it fain be the other thing," interposed the maiden, with decision. "Your gladness came to a sad end, minstrel."

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

"Involved questions are by no means void of divertisement," remarked Shen Yi, with conciliatory mildness in his voice. "There was one, turning on the contradictory nature of a door which under favourable conditions was indistinguishable from an earthenware vessel, that seldom failed to baffle the unalert in the days before the binding of this person's hair."

"That was the one which it had been my feeble intention to propound," confessed Chang Tao.

"Doubtless there are many others equally enticing," suggested Shen Yi helpfully.

"Alas," admitted Chang Tao, with conscious humiliation; "of all those wherein I retain an adequate grasp of the solution, the complication eludes me at the moment, and thus in a like but converse manner with the others."

"Esteemed parent," remarked Melodious Vision, without emotion, "this is neither a minstrel nor one in any way entertaining. It is merely Another."

"Another!" exclaimed Chang Tao in refined bitterness. "Is it possible that after taking so extreme and unorthodox a course as to ignore the Usages and advance myself in person I am to find that I have not even the mediocre originality of being the first, as a recommendation?"

"If the matter is thus and thus, so far from being the first, you are only the last of a considerable line of worthy and enterprising youths who have succeeded in gaining access to the inner part of this not really attractive residence on one pretext or another," replied the tolerant Shen Yi. "In any case you are honourably welcome. From the position of your various features I now judge you to be Tao, only son of the virtuous house of Chang. May you prove more successful in your enterprise than those who have preceded you."

"The adventure appears to be tending in unforeseen directions," said Chang Tao uneasily. "Your felicitation, benign,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

though doubtless gold at heart, is set in a doubtful frame."

"It is for your stalwart endeavour to assure a happy picture," replied Shen Yi, with undisturbed cordiality. "You bear a sword."

"What added involvement is this?" demanded Chang Tao. "This one's thoughts and intention were not turned towards savagery and arms, but in the direction of a pacific union of two distinguished lines."

"In such cases my attitude has invariably been one of sympathetic unconcern," declared Shen Yi. "The weight of tolerant impartiality thus thrown into the balance equally on either side produces an atmosphere of absolute poise that cannot fail to give full play to the decision of the destinies."

"But if this attitude is maintained on your part how can the proposal progress to a definite issue?" inquired Chang Tao.

"So far, it never has so progressed," admitted Shen Yi. "None of the worthy and hard-striving young men—any of whom I should have been overjoyed to greet as a son-in-law had my inopportune sense of impartiality permitted it—has yet returned from the trial to claim the reward."

"Even the Classics become obscure in the dark. Clear your throat of all doubtfulness, O Shen Yi, and speak to a definite end."

"That duty devolves upon this person, O would-be propounder of involved questions," interposed Melodious Vision. Her voice was more musical than a stand of hanging jewels touched by a rod of jade, and each word fell like a separate pearl. "He who ignores the Usages must expect to find the Usages ignored. Since the day when K'ung-tsz framed the Ceremonies much water has passed beneath the Seven Terraced Bridge, and that which has overflowed can never be picked up again. It is no longer enough that you should come and thereby I must go; that you should speak and I be silent; that you should beckon and I meekly obey. In-

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

spired by the uprisen sisterhood of the outer barbarian lands, we of the inner chambers of the Illimitable Kingdom demand the right to express ourselves freely on every occasion and on every subject, whether the matter involved is one that we understand or not."

"Your clear-cut words will carry far," said Chang Tao deferentially, and, indeed, Melodious Vision's voice had imperceptibly assumed a penetrating quality that justified the remark. "Yet is it fitting that beings so superior in every way should be swayed by the example of those who are necessarily uncivilised and rude?"

"Even a mole may instruct a philosopher in the art of digging," replied the maiden, with graceful tolerance. "Thus among these uncouth tribes it is the custom, when a valiant youth would enlarge his face in the eyes of a maiden, that he should encounter forth and slay dragons, to the imperishable glory of her name. By this beneficent habit not only are the feeble and inept automatically disposed of, but the difficulty of choosing one from among a company of suitors, all apparently possessing the same superficial attributes, is materially lightened."

"The system may be advantageous in those dark regions," admitted Chang Tao reluctantly, "but it must prove unsatisfactory in our more favoured land."

"In what detail?" demanded the maiden, pausing in her attitude of assured superiority.

"By the essential drawback that whereas in those neglected outer parts there really are no dragons, here there really are. Thus——"

"Doubtless there are barbarian maidens for those who prefer to encounter barbarian dragons then," exclaimed Melodious Vision, with a very elaborately sustained air of no-concern.

"Doubtless," assented Chang Tao mildly. "Yet having

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

set forth in the direction of a specific Vision it is this person's intention to pursue it to an ultimate end."

"The quiet duck puts his foot on the unobservant worm," murmured Shen Yi, with delicate encouragement, adding: "This one casts a more definite shadow than those before."

"Yet," continued the maiden, "to all, my unbending word is this: he who would return for approval must encounter difficulties, overcome dangers and conquer dragons. Those who do not adventure on the quest will pass outward from this person's mind."

"And those who do will certainly Pass Upward from their own bodies," ran the essence of the youth's inner thoughts. Yet the network of her unevadable power and presence was upon him; he acquiescently replied:

"It is accepted. On such an errand difficulties and dangers will not require any especial search. Yet how many dragons slain will suffice to win approval?"

"Crocodile-eyed one!" exclaimed Melodious Vision, surprised into wrathfulness. "How many——" Here she withdrew in abrupt vehemence.

"Your progress has been rapid and profound," remarked Shen Yi, as, with flattering attention, he accompanied Chang Tao some part of the way towards the door. "Never before has that one been known to leave a remark unsaid; I do not altogether despair of seeing her married yet. As regards the encounter with the dragon—well, in the case of the one whispering in your ear there was the revered mother of the one whom he sought. After all, a dragon is soon done with—one way or the other."

In such a manner Chang Tao set forth to encounter dragons, well assured that difficulties and dangers would accompany him on either side. In this latter detail he was inspired, but as the great light faded and the sky-lanterns rose in interminable succession, while the unconquerable li ever stretched before his expectant feet, the essential part of the

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

undertaking began to assume a dubious facet. In the valleys and fertile places he learned that creatures of this part now chiefly inhabited the higher fastnesses, such regions being more congenial to their wild and intractable natures. When, however, after many laborious marches he reached the upper peaks of pathless mountains the scanty crag-dwellers did not vary in their assertion that the dragons had for some time past forsaken those heights for the more settled profusion of the plains. Formerly, in both places they had been plentiful, and all those whom Chang Tao questioned spoke openly of many encounters between their immediate forefathers and such Beings.

It was in the downcast frame of mind to which the delays in accomplishing his mission gave rise that Chang Tao found himself walking side by side with one who bore the appearance of an affluent merchant. The northernward way was remote and solitary, but seeing that the stranger carried no outward arms Chang Tao greeted him suitably and presently spoke of the difficulty of meeting dragons, or of discovering their retreats from the dwellers in that region.

"In such delicate matters those who know don't talk, and those who talk don't know," replied the other sympathetically. "Yet for what purpose should one who would pass as a pacific student seek to encounter dragons?"

"For a sufficient private reason it is necessary that I should kill a certain number," replied Chang Tao freely. "Thus their absence involves me in much ill-spared delay."

At this avowal the stranger's looks became more sombre, and he breathed inward several times between his formidable teeth before he made reply.

"This is doubtless your angle, but there is equally another; nor is it well to ignore the saying, 'Should you miss the tiger be assured that he will not miss you,'" he remarked at length. "Have you sufficiently considered the eventuality of a dragon killing you?"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"It is no less aptly said, 'To be born is in the course of nature, but to die is according to the decree of destiny.'"

"That is a two-edged weapon, and the dragon may be the first to apply it."

"In that case this person will fall back upon the point of the adage, 'It is better to die two years too soon than to live one year too long,'" replied Chang Tao. "Should he fail in the adventure and thus lose all hope of Melodious Vision, of the house of Shen, there will be no further object in prolonging a wearisome career."

"You speak of Melodious Vision, she being of the house of Shen," said the stranger, regarding his companion with an added scrutiny. "Is the unmentioned part of her father's honourable name Yi, and is his agreeable house so positioned that it fronts upon a summer-seat domed with red copper?"

"The description is exact," admitted Chang Tao. "Have you, then, in the course of your many-sided travels, passed that way?"

"It is not unknown to me," replied the other briefly. "Learn now how incautious has been your speech, and how narrowly you have avoided the exact fate of which I warned you. The one speaking to you is in reality a powerful dragon, his name being Pe-lung, from the circumstance that the northern limits are within his sway. Had it not been for a chance reference you would certainly have been struck dead at the parting of our ways."

"If this is so it admittedly puts a new face upon the matter," agreed Chang Tao. "Yet how can reliance be spontaneously placed upon so incredible a claim? You are a man of moderate cast, neither diffident nor austere, and with no unnatural attributes. All the dragons with which history is concerned possess a long body and a scaly skin, and have, moreover, the power of breathing fire at will."

"That is easily put to the test." No sooner had Pe-lung uttered these words than he faded, and in his place appeared

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

a formidable monster possessing all the terror-inspiring characteristics of his kind. Yet in spite of his tree-like eyebrows, fiercely moving whiskers and fire-breathing jaws, his voice was mild and pacific as he continued: "What further proof can be required? Assuredly, the self-opinionated spirit in which you conduct your quest will bring you no nearer to a desired end."

"Yet this will!" exclaimed Chang Tao, and suddenly drawing his reliable sword he drove it through the middle part of the dragon's body. So expertly was the thrust weighted that the point of the weapon protruded on the other side and scarred the earth. Instead of falling lifeless to the ground, however, the Being continued to regard its assailant with benignant composure, whereupon the youth withdrew the blade and drove it through again, five or six times more. As this produced no effect beyond rendering the edge of the weapon unfit for further use, and almost paralyzing the sinews of his own right arm, Chang Tao threw away the sword and sat down in the road in order to recall his breath. When he raised his head again the dragon had disappeared and Pe-lung stood there as before.

"Fortunately it is possible to take a broad-minded view of your uncourteous action, owing to your sense of the fitnesses being for the time in abeyance through allegiance to so engaging a maiden as Melodious Vision," said Pe-lung in a voice not devoid of reproach. "Had you but confided in me more fully I should certainly have cautioned you in time. As it is, you have ended by notching your otherwise capable weapon beyond repair and seriously damaging the scanty cloak I wear"—indicating the numerous rents that marred his dress of costly fur. "No wonder dejection sits upon your downcast brow."

"Your priceless robe is a matter of profuse regret and my self-esteem can only be restored by your accepting in its place this threadbare one of mine. My rust-eaten sword

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

is unworthy of your second thought. But certainly neither of these two details is the real reason of my dark despair."

"Disclose yourself more openly," urged Pe-lung.

"I now plainly recognise the futility of my well-intentioned quest. Obviously it is impossible to kill a dragon, and I am thus the sport of either Melodious Vision's deliberate ridicule or of my own ill-arranged presumption."

"Set your mind at rest upon that score: each blow was competently struck and convincingly fatal. You may quite fittingly claim to have slain half-a-dozen dragons at the least—none of the legendary champions of the past has done more."

"Yet how can so arrogant a claim be held, seeing that you stand before me in the unimpaired state of an ordinary existence?"

"The explanation is simple and assuring. It is, in reality, very easy to kill a dragon, but it is impossible to keep him dead. The reason for this is that the Five Essential Constituents of fire, water, earth, wood and metal are blended in our bodies in the Sublime or Indivisible proportion. Thus, although it is not difficult by extreme violence to disturb the harmonious balance of the Constituents, and so bring about the effect of no-existence, they at once retranquillise again, and all effect of the ill usage is spontaneously repaired."

"That is certainly a logical solution, but it stands in doubtful stead when applied to the familiar requirements of life; nor is it probable that one so acute-witted as Melodious Vision would greet the claim with an acquiescent face," replied Chang Tao. "Not unnaturally is it said, 'He who kills tigers does not wear rat-skin sleeves.' It would be one thing to make a boast of having slain six dragons; it would be quite another to be bidden to bring in their tails."

"That is a difficulty which must be considered," admitted Pe-lung, "but a path round it will inevitably be found. In the meantime night is beginning to encircle us, and many

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

dark Powers will be freed and resort to these inaccessible slopes. Accompany me, therefore, to my bankrupt hovel, where you will be safe until you care to resume your journey."

To this agreeable proposal Chang Tao at once assented. The way was long and laborious. "For," remarked Pe-lung, "in an ordinary course I should fly there in a single breath of time; but to seize an honoured guest by the body-cloth and thus transfer him over the side of a mountain is toilsome to the one and humiliating to the other."

To beguile the time he spoke freely of the hardships of his lot.

"We dragons are frequently objects of envy at the hands of the indiscriminating, but the few superficial privileges we enjoy are heavily balanced by the exacting scope of our duties. Thus to-night it is my degraded task to divert the course of the river flowing below us, so as to overwhelm the misguided town of Yang, wherein dwells a sordid outcast who has reviled the Sacred Claw. In order to do this properly it will be my distressing part to lie across the bed of the stream, my head resting upon one bank and my tail upon the other, and so remain throughout the rigour of the night."

As they approached the cloudy pinnacle whereon was situated the dragon's cave, one came forth at a distance to meet them. As she drew nearer, alternating emotions from time to time swayed Chang Tao's mind. From beneath a well-ruled eyebrow Pe-lung continued to observe him closely.

"Fuh-sang, the unattractive daughter of my dwindling line," remarked the former person, with refined indifference. "I have rendered you invisible, and she, as her custom is, would advance to greet me."

"But this enchanting apparition is Melodious Vision!" exclaimed Chang Tao. "What new bewilderment is here?"

"Since you have thus expressed yourself, I will now throw off the mask and reveal fully why I have hitherto spared

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

your life, and for what purpose I have brought you to these barren heights," replied Pe-lung. "In the past Shen Yi provoked the Deities, and to mark their displeasure it was decided to take away his she-child and to substitute for it one of demoniac birth. To this end Fuh-sang, being of like age, was moulded to its counterpart, and an attendant gnome was dispatched with her secretly to make the change. Becoming overwhelmed with the fumes of rice-spirit, until then unknown to his simple taste, this clay-brained earth-pig left the two she-children alone for a space while he slept. Discovering each other to be the creature of another part, they battled together and tore from one another the signs of recognition. When the untrustworthy gnome recovered from his stupor he saw what he had done, but being terror-driven he took up one of the she-children at a venture and returned with a pliant tale. It was not until a few moons ago that while in a close extremity he confessed his crime. Meanwhile Shen Yi had made his peace with those Above and the order being revoked the she-children had been exchanged again. Thus the matter rests."

"Which, then, of the twain is she inherent of your house and which Melodious Vision?" demanded Chang Tao in some concern. "The matter can assuredly not rest thus."

"That," replied Pe-lung affably, "it will be your engaging task to unravel, and to this end will be your opportunity of closely watching Fuh-sang's unsuspecting movements in my absence through the night."

"Yet how should I, to whom the way of either maiden is as yet no more than the title-page of a many-volumed book, succeed where the father native to one has failed?"

"Because in your case the incentive will be deeper. Destined, as you doubtless are, to espouse Melodious Vision, the Forces connected with marriage and the like will certainly endeavour to inspire you. This person admittedly has no desire to nurture one who should prove to be of merely

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

human seed, but your objection to propagating a race of dragonets turns on a keener edge. Added to this, a not unnatural disinclination to be dropped from so great a height as this into so deep and rocky a valley as that will conceivably add wings to your usually nimble-footed mind."

While speaking to Chang Tao in this encouraging strain, Pe-lung was also conversing suitably with Fuh-sang, who had by this time joined them, warning her of his absence until the dawn, and the like. When he had completed his instruction he stroked her face affectionately, greeted Chang Tao with a short but appropriate farewell, and changing his form projected himself downwards into the darkness of the valley below. Recognising that the situation into which he had been drawn possessed no other outlet, Chang Tao followed Fuh-sang on her backward path, and with her passed unsuspected into the dragon's cave.

Early as was Pe-lung's return on the following morning, Chang Tao stood on a rocky eminence to greet him, and the outline of his face, though not altogether clear of doubt, was by no means hopeless. Pe-lung still retained the impressive form of a gigantic dragon as he cleft the Middle Air, shining and iridescent, each beat of his majestic wings being as a roll of thunder and the skittering of sand and water from his crepitant scales leaving blights and rainstorms in his wake. When he saw Chang Tao he drove an earthward angle and alighting near at hand considerably changed into the semblance of an affluent merchant as he approached.

"Greeting," he remarked cheerfully. "Did you find your early rice?"

"It has sufficed," replied Chang Tao. "How is your own incomparable stomach?"

Pe-lung pointed to the empty bed of the deflected river and moved his head from side to side as one who draws an analogy to his own condition. "But of your more pressing enterprise," he continued, with sympathetic concern: "have

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

you persevered to a fruitful end, or will it be necessary——?” And with tactful feeling he indicated the gesture of propelling an antagonist over the side of a precipice rather than allude to the disagreeable contingency in spoken words.

“When the oil is exhausted the lamp goes out,” admitted Chang Tao, “but my time is not yet come. During the visionary watches of the night my poisoning mind was sustained by Forces, as you so presciently foretold, and my groping hand was led to an inspired solution of the truth.”

“This points to a specific end. Proceed,” urged Pe-lung, for Chang Tao hesitated among his words as though their import might not be soothing to the other’s mind.

“Thus it is given me to declare: she who is called Melodious Vision is rightly of the house of Shen, and Fuh-sang is no less innate of your exalted tribe. The erring gnome, in spite of his misdeed, was but a finger of the larger hand of destiny, and as it is, it is.”

“This assurance gladdens my face, no less for your sake than for my own,” declared Pe-lung heartily. “For my part, I have found a way to enlarge you in the eyes of those whom you solicit. It is a custom with me that every thousand years I should discard my outer skin—not that it requires it, but there are certain standards to which we better-class dragons must conform. These sloughs are hidden beneath a secret stone, beyond the reach of the merely vain or curious. When you have disclosed the signs by which I shall have securance of Fuh-sang’s identity I will pronounce the word and the stone being thus released you shall bear away six suits of scales in token of your prowess.”

Then replied Chang Tao: “The signs. Assuredly. Yet, omnipotence, without your express command the specific detail would be elusive to my respectful tongue.”

“You have the authority of my extended hand,” conceded Pe-lung readily, raising it as he spoke. “Speak freely.”

“I claim the protection of its benignant shadow,” said

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

Chang Tao, with content. "You, O Pe-lung, are one who has mingled freely with creatures of every kind in all the Nine Spaces. Yet have you not, out of your vast experience thus gained, perceived the essential wherein men and dragons differ? Briefly and devoid of graceful metaphor, every dragon, esteemed, would seem to possess a tail; beings of my part have none."

For a concise moment the nature of Pe-lung's reflection was clouded in ambiguity, though the fact that he became entirely enveloped in a dense purple vapour indicated feelings of more than usual vigour. When this cleared away it left his outer form unchanged indeed, but the affable condescension of his manner was merged into one of dignified aloofness.

"Certainly all members of our enlightened tribe have tails," he replied, with distant precision, "nor does this one see how any other state is possible. Changing as we constantly do, both male and female, into Beings, Influences, Shadows and unclothed creatures of the lower parts, it is essential for our mutual self-esteem that in every manifestation we should be thus equipped. At this moment, though in the guise of a substantial trader, I possess a tail small but adequate. Is it possible that you and those of your insolvent race are destitute?"

"In this particular, magnificence, I and those of my threadbare species are most lamentably deficient. To the proving of this end shall I display myself?"

"It is not necessary," said Pe-lung coldly. "It is inconceivable that, were it otherwise, you would admit the humiliating fact."

"Yet out of your millenaries of experience you must already——"

"It is well said that after passing a commonplace object a hundred times a day, at nightfall its size and colour are unknown to one," replied Pe-lung. "In this matter, from

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

motives which cannot have been otherwise than delicate, I took too much for granted it would seem. . . . Then you—all—Shen Yi, Melodious Vision, the military governor of this province, even the sublime Emperor—all——?”

“All tailless,” admitted Chang Tao, with conscious humility. “Nevertheless there is a tradition that in distant æons——”

“Doubtless on some issue you roused the High Ones past forgiveness and were thus deprived as the most signal mark of their displeasure.”

“Doubtless,” assented Chang Tao, with unquenchable politeness.

“Coming to the correct attitude that you have maintained throughout, it would appear that during the silent gong-strokes of the night, by some obscure and indirect guidance it was revealed to you that Fuh—that any Being of my superior race was, on the contrary——” The menace of Pe-lung’s challenging eye, though less direct and assured than formerly, had the manner of being uncertainly restrained by a single much-frayed thread, but Chang Tao continued to meet it with respectful self-possession.

“The inference is unflinching,” he replied acquiescently. “I prostrate myself expectantly.”

“You have competently performed your part,” admitted Pe-lung, although an occasional jet of purple vapour clouded his upper person and the passage of his breath among his teeth would have been distasteful to one of sensitive refinement. “Nothing remains but the fulfilling of my iron word.”

Thereupon he pronounced a mystic word and revealing the opening to a cave he presently brought forth six sets of armoured skin. Binding these upon Chang Tao’s back, he dismissed him, yet the manner of his parting was as of one who is doubtful even to the end.

Thus equipped——

But who having made a distant journey into Outer Lands

THE STORY OF CHANG TAO

speaks lengthily of the level path of his return, or of the evening glow upon the gilded roof of his awaiting home? Thus, this limit being reached in the essential story of Chang Tao, Melodious Vision and the Dragon, he who relates their commonplace happenings bows submissively.

Nevertheless it is true that once again in a later time Chang Tao encountered in a throng one whom he recognised. Encouraged by the presence of so many of his kind, he approached the other and saluted him.

"Greeting, O Pe-lung," he said, with outward confidence. "What bends your footsteps into this busy place of men?"

"I come to buy an imitation pig-tail to pass for one," replied Pe-lung, with quiet composure. "Greeting, valorous champion! How fares Melodious Vision?"

"Agreeably so," admitted Chang Tao, and then, fearing that so far his reply had been inadequate, he added: "Yet despite the facts, there are moments when this person almost doubts if he did not make a wrong choice in the matter after all."

"That is a very common complaint," said Pe-lung, becoming most offensively amused.

“THE WHITEBOYS”

By E. Æ. SOMERVILLE AND MARTIN ROSS

I

ON a certain still and steamy afternoon in late September it chanced to me to visit the kennels of my friend and neighbour, Flurry Knox, at the moment of the feeding of his hounds. Flurry, and his kennel huntsman and whipper-in, Michael, were superintending the operation, coldly observing the gobbling line at the trough, like reporters at a public dinner. It was not until the last horrid remnants had been wolfed that Mr. Knox yielded me his attention.

“Major,” he said, “I didn’t tell you I have three couple of O’Reilly’s old Irish hounds bought. They’re the old white breed y’know, and they say they’re terrors to hunt.”

“They’d steal a thing out of your eye,” said Michael, evidently reverting to an interrupted discussion between himself and his master. There’s an O’Reilly woman married back in the country here, and she says they killed two cows last season.”

“If they kill any cows with me, I’ll stop the price of them out of your wages, Michael, my lad!” said Flurry to his henchman’s back. “Look here, Major, come on with me to-morrow and bring them home!”

From *Further Experiences of an Irish R. M.*, copyright, 1908, by Longmans Green and Company.

This story has been slightly condensed for the purpose of this volume.—E. Æ. S.

"THE WHITEBOYS"

I went. The mountain fastness of the O'Reillys was no more than fifty miles away, across country; nevertheless, at one o'clock, two lines of rails had done their utmost for us, and had ceded to the invariable outside car the task of conveying us up the long flank of mountain that had still to be climbed. A stream, tawny and translucent as audit ale, foamed and slid among its brown boulders beside us. As we crawled upwards the fields became smaller, and the lonely whitewashed cottages ceased. The heather came down to the wheel marks, and a pack of grouse suddenly whizzed across the road like a shot fired across our bows to warn us off.

At the top of the pass we stood and looked out over half a county to the pale peaks of Killarney.

"There's Fahoura now, gentlemen," said the carman, pointing downwards with his whip to a group of whitewashed farm buildings that had gathered themselves incongruously about a squat grey tower. "I'm told old Mr. O'Reilly's sick this good while."

"What ails him?" said Flurry.

"You wouldn't know," said the carman, "sure he's very old, and that 'fluenzy has the country destroyed; there's people dying now that never died before."

"That's bad," said Flurry, sympathetically.

"I had a letter from him, and he only said he was parting the hounds because he couldn't run with them any more."

"Ah, don't mind him!" said the carman, "it's what it is he'd sooner sell them now, than to give the nephew the satisfaction of them, after himself'd be dead."

"Is that the chap that's been hunting them for him?" said Flurry, while I, for the hundredth time, longed for Flurry's incommunicable gift of being talked to.

"It is, sir; Lukey O'Reilly—" the carman gave a short laugh. "That's the lad! They say he often thried to go

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

to America, but he never got south of Mallow; he gets that drunk sayin' good-bye to his friends!"

"Maybe the old fellow will live a while yet, just to spite him," suggested Flurry.

"Well, maybe he would, faith!" agreed the carman, "didn't the docthor say to meself that maybe it's walking the road I'd be, and I to fall down dead!" he continued complacently, "but sure them docthors, when they would know what was in it, they should be saying something!"

We here turned into the lane that led to Mr. O'Reilly's house. We pulled up at the gate of a wide farmyard, with out-crops of the brown mountain rock in it, and were assailed in the inevitable way by the inevitable mongrel collies. Blent with their vulgar abuse was the mellow baying of hounds, coming, seemingly, from the sky. The carman pointed to the tower which filled an angle of the yard, and I saw, about twenty feet from the ground, an arrow-slit, through which protruded white muzzles, uttering loud and tuneful threats.

"The kitchen door's the handiest way," said Flurry, "but I suppose for grandeur we'd better go to the front of the house."

He opened a side gate, and I followed him through a wind-swept enclosure that by virtue of two ragged rose-bushes, and a walk edged with white stones, probably took rank as a garden. At the front door we knocked; a long pause ensued, and finally bare feet thudded down a passage, a crack of the door was opened, and an eye glistened for a moment in the crack. The door was slammed again, and after a further delay it was re-opened, this time by a large elderly woman with crinkled black and grey hair and one long and commanding tooth in the front of her mouth.

"Why then I wasn't looking to see ye till to-morrow, Mr. Knox!" she began, beaming upon Flurry, "but sure ye're welcome any day and all day, and the gentleman too!"

The gentleman was introduced, and felt himself being

“THE WHITEBOYS”

summed up in a single glance of Miss O'Reilly's nimble brown eyes. With many apologies, she asked us if we would come and see her brother in the kitchen as he did not feel well enough to walk out to the parlour, and she couldn't keep him in the bed at all.

The kitchen differed more in size than in degree from that of the average cabin. There were the same hummocky earthen floor, the same sallow whitewashed walls, the same all-pervading turf-smoke—the difference was in the master of the house. He was seated by the fire in an angular arm-chair, with an old horse-blanket over his knees, and a stick in his hand, and beside him lay an ancient white hound, who scarcely lifted her head at our entrance. The old man laboured to his feet, and, bent as he was, he towered over Flurry as he took his hand.

“Your father's son is welcome, Mr. Florence Knox, and your friend—” He was short of breath, and he lowered his great frame into his chair again.

“Sit down, gentlemen, sit down!” he commanded. “Jo-anna! These gentlemen are after having a long drive——”

The clink of glasses told that the same fact had occurred to Miss O'Reilly, and a bottle of port, and another of what looked like water, but was in effect old potheen, were immediately upon the table.

“How well ye wouldn't put down a glass for me!” thundered old O'Reilly. “I suppose it's saving it for my wake you are!”

“Or her own wedding, maybe!” said Flurry, shamelessly ogling Miss O'Reilly, “we'll see that before the wake, I'm thinking!”

“Well, well, isn't he the dead spit of his father!” said Miss O'Reilly to the rafters.

“Here, woman, give me the kettle,” said her brother, “I'll drink my glass of punch with Mr. Florence Knox, the way I did with his father before him! The doctor says I might

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

carry out six months, and I think myself I won't carry out the week, but what the divil do I care! I'm going to give Mr. Knox his pick of my hounds this day, and that's what no other man in Ireland would get, and be dam' we'll wet our bargain!"

"Well, well," said Miss O'Reilly remonstratingly, bringing the kettle, "and you that was that weak last night that if you got Ireland's crown you couldn't lift the bedclothes off your arms!"

"Them hounds are in my family, seed and breed, this hundred years and more," continued old O'Reilly, silencing his sister with one black glance from under his thick grey brows, "and if I had e'er a one that was fit to come after me, they'd never leave it!" He took a gulp of the hot punch. "Did ye ever hear of my brother Phil that was huntsman to the Charlevilles long ago, Mr. Knox? Your father knew him well. Many's the good hunt they rode together. He wasn't up to forty years when he was killed; broke his neck jumping a hurl, and when they went to bury him it's straight in over the churchyard wall they took him! They said he was never one to go round looking for a gate!"

"May the Lord have mercy on him!" murmured Miss O'Reilly in the background.

"Amen!" growled the old man, taking another pull at his steaming tumbler, as if he were drinking his brother's health. "And look at me here," he went on, reddening slowly through the white stubble on his cheeks, "dying as soft as any owld cow in a boghole, and all they'll be saying after me is asking would they get their bellyful of whiskey at my wake! I tell you this—and let you be listening to me, Joanna!—what hounds Mr. Knox doesn't take, I'll not leave them after me to be disgraced in the counthry, running rabbits on Sunday afternoons with them poaching black-

“THE WHITEBOYS”

guards up out of the town! No! But they'll have a stone round their neck and to be thrown below in the lough!”

I thought of the nephew Luke, whose friends had so frequently failed to see him off, and I felt very sorry for old O'Reilly.

“They will, they will, to be sure!” said Miss O'Reilly soothingly. “And look at you now, the way you are! Didn't I know well you had no call to be drinking that punch, you that was coughing all night! On the face of God's earth, Mr. Knox, I never heard such a cough! 'Tis like a sheep's cough! I declare it's like the sound of the beating of the drum!”

“Well, Mr. O'Reilly,” said Flurry, ignoring these remarkable symptoms, but none the less playing to her lead, “I suppose we might have a look at the hounds now.”

“Go, tell Tom to open the tower door,” said old O'Reilly to his sister, after a moment's silence. He handed her a key. “And shut the gate, you.”

As soon as she had gone he got on to his feet. “Mr. Knox, sir,” he said, “might I put as much trouble on you as to move out this chair to the door? I'll sit there the way I can see them. Maybe the other gentleman would reach me down the horn that's up on the wall. He's near as tall as meself.”

Flurry did as he was asked, and helped him across the room.

“Close out the half-door, if you please, Mr. Knox, and give me the old rug that's there, my feet is destroyed with the rheumatics.”

He dropped groaningly into his chair, and I handed him the horn, an old brass one, bent and dented.

Already the clamour of the hounds in the tower had broken out like bells in a steeple, as they heard the footsteps of their jailer on the stone steps of their prison.

Then Tom's voice shouting at them in Irish to stand

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

back, and then through the narrow door of the tower the hounds themselves, a striving torrent of white flecked with pale yellow, like one of their own mountain streams. There were about seven couples of them, and in a moment they overran the yard like spilt quicksilver.

"Look at them now, Mr. Knox!" said their owner. "They'd take a line over the hob o' hell this minute!"

Pending this feat they took a very good line into what was apparently the hen-house, judging by the hysterics that proceeded from within. Almost immediately one of them reappeared with an egg in his mouth. Old O'Reilly gave a laugh and an attempt at a holloa.

"Ah ha! That's Whiteboy! The rogue!" he said, and putting the horn to his lips he blew a thin and broken note that was cut short by a cough.

Speechlessly he handed the horn to Flurry, but no further summons was needed; the hounds had heard him. They converged upon the doorway with a rush, and Flurry and I were put to it to keep them from jumping in over the half-door.

I had never seen hounds like them before. One or two were pure white, but most had some touch of faded yellow or pale grey about them; they were something smaller than the average foxhound, and were strongly built, and active as terriers. But wherein, to the unprofessional eye, they chiefly differed from the established pattern, was in the human lawlessness of their expression. The old hound by the fire had struggled up at the note of the horn, and stood staring in perplexity at her master, and growling, with all the arrogance of the favourite, at her descendants, who yelped, and clawed, and strove, and thrust their muzzles over the half-door.

"There they are for you now, Mr. Knox," said old O'Reilly, still panting after his fit of coughing. "There

"THE WHITEBOYS"

isn't another man in Ireland would get them but yourself, and you've got them, as I might say, a present!"

Flurry and I went out into the yard, and the door was closed behind us.

.

We did not see our host again. His sister told us that he had gone to bed and wasn't fit to see anyone, but he wished Mr. Knox luck with his bargain, and he sent him this for a luck-penny. She handed Flurry the dinted horn.

"I'm thinking it's fretting after the hounds he is," she said, turning her head away to hide the tears in her brown eyes.

I have never till then known Flurry completely at a loss for an answer.

2

A fortnight later I saw the white hounds in the field. I had accomplished the dreary and hurried toilet of the cub-hunter, and at 5:30 a.m. the worst was over, and I had met Flurry and the hounds, with Michael and Dr. Jerome Hickey, at the appointed cross-roads.

It was still an hour before sunrise, but a pallor was in the sky, and the hounds, that had at first been like a gliding shoal of fish round the horses' feet, began to take on their own shapes and colours.

The white Irish hounds were the first to disclose themselves, each coupled up with a tried old stager, and finding Flurry unresponsive to enquiries about them I fell back on Michael.

"Is it settling down they are?" said Michael derisively. "That's the fine settling down! Roaring and screeching every minute since they came into the place! And as for fighting! They weren't in the kennel three days before

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

they had Rampant ate, and nothing only his paws left before me in the morning! The like o' them trash isn't fit for a gentleman's kennels. It'd be as good for me to be trying to turn curlews as them!"

The indictment of "The Whiteboys" (a title sarcastically bestowed by Dr. Hickey) lasted, like an Arabian Nights' tale, till the rising of the sun, and also until our arrival at the place we were to draw. This was a long and deep ravine, red with bracken, bushy with hazel and alders; a black stream raced through it, spreading at the end into bog; a place that instantly assures the riders that if hounds get away on its farther side he will not be with them.

A couple of men were awaiting us.

"They're in it surely!" they said, shoving down a stone gap for our benefit. "There isn't a morning but we'll see the owld fellow and his pups funning away for themselves down by the river!"

The first ten minutes proved that the foxes were certainly there, and during the following half-hour pandemonium raged in the ravine. There were, I believe, a brace and a-half of cubs on foot, to me, invisible, but viewed about twice in every minute by Flurry, and continuously by the countrymen.

The hounds were wilder than I had ever known them. They ignored the horn, eluded Michael, and laughed at Hickey and me. They ran the earth-stopper's dog, and having killed him, ate him, secure from interruption in the briary depths of the ravine. A couple of goats were only saved from them by miracles of agility and courage on the part of the countrymen. The best that could be said for them was that "linking one virtue with a thousand crimes," whenever the hounds got out of covert, the Whiteboys were together and were in front.

It was eight o'clock, and the fierce red and grey sunrise had been overridden by a regiment of stormy clouds, when

“THE WHITEBOYS”

one of the foxes met his fate, amid ear-piercing whoops, and ecstatic comments from the onlookers.

“I’m told if ye’ll see a fox taking a hen and ye’ll call to him in Irish, that he’ll drop it,” remarked an oldish man to me, while the repast was in progress.

Flurry caught at the word and looked round: “Why the deuce can’t Michael get those Irish hounds?” he said. “I have only Lily here.”

(Lily was the romantic name of one of the Whiteboys.)

“I believe I seen a two-three of the white dogs on the hill over awhile ago,” said the elderly farmer, “and they yowling!”

“They’re likely killing a sheep now,” murmured Hickey to me.

At the same moment there came into sight what seemed to be five seagulls, gliding up a rift of grass that showed green between rocks and heather.

“Well, well,” said the farmer, “they’re after wheeling round the length of the valley in the minute! They’re nearly able to fly!”

We traversed the valley at full speed, and tackled the ladder of mud that formed the track up the ravine, hounds and country boys jostling to get forward, with pistol-shots behind from Hickey’s thong, and the insistent doubling of Flurry’s horn in front. On the level ground at the top we found some hounds, casting themselves dubiously on a sedgey space; of Michael nothing was to be seen. Lily, alone of the Whiteboys, remained, and she, far to the left of the rest of the hounds, was thoughtfully nosing along through tufts of rushes. She worked her way to a fence, then, mute as a wraith, slid over it and slipped away across a grass field.

“Hark forrad to Lily, hounds!” roared Flurry, with electrical suddenness. “Put them on to her, Jerome!”

“Well, those white hounds are the devil!” said Dr. Hickey, with a break of admiration in his voice, as the hounds,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

driving ahead, proclaimed to heaven that they had got the line.

After an eventful yet pleasing ten minutes of racing over a country that had, on a low average, seventeen jumps to the mile, we found ourselves on a road, with the hounds at fault, casting themselves eagerly right and left. Here we encountered Michael, a dolorous spectacle, covered with mud, his mare dead lame.

"What way did those white hounds go?" shouted Flurry through the rioting wind.

"The last I seen they were running this road west. There was two fellows with a bread-van, and they said likely the fox was making for a fort that's back in Drummig, on one Donovan's land. They said if the hounds got down in it we'd hardly see them again—there was holes in it that'd nearly reach the sea——"

"What the devil good were you that you didn't stop those hounds?" said Flurry, with a face as black as the weather. "Go on home with that mare. Here!" he called to Hickey and me. "Come on! The road's our quickest way——"

The farmhouse of Donovan of Drummig was connected with the high road by the usual narrow and stony lane; as we neared its entrance we saw through the swirls of rain a baker's van bumping down it. There were two men on the van, and in the shafts was a raking young brown horse, who, having espied the hounds, was honouring them with what is politically known as a demonstration.

One of the men held up his hand, and shouted a request to "hold on awhile till they were on the road."

"Did you see any hounds?" shouted back Flurry, keeping back the pack, as the van bounded round the corner and into the main road, with an activity rare in its species.

"We did, sir," returned the men in chorus, clinging to the rail of their knifeboard seat, like the crew of a racing

“THE WHITEBOYS”

yacht, “they’re back in the fort above this minute! Ye can take your time, faith!”

The van horse reared and backed, and Flurry turned in his saddle to eye him as he ramped ahead in response to a slash from his driver; so did Hickey, and so also did Lily, who, with her white nose in the air, snuffed inquisitively after the departing van.

“You’d say she knew a good horse when she saw him,” said Hickey.

“Or a good loaf of bread,” I suggested.

“It’s little bread that lad carries!” answered Hickey, thonging the reluctant Lily on; “I’ll go bail there’s as much bottled porter as bread in that van!”

As we splashed into the farmyard a young man threw open a gate at its farther side, shouting to Flurry to hurry. He waved us on across a wide field, towards a low mound, red with wet withered bracken, and crested by a group of lean fir trees, flinging their arms about in the wild gusts of wind and rain.

“The fox wasn’t the length of himself in front of them!” shouted the young man, running beside us. “And he as big as a donkey! The whole kit o’ them is inside in the fort together!”

Flurry turned his horse suddenly.

“Two and a half couple underground is enough for one while,” he said, riding back into the farmyard. “Have you any place I could shove these hounds into?”

The door of a cow-house was open, and the hounds, as if in anticipation of his wishes, jostled emulously into the darkness within.

The place in which the fox and the Irish hounds had entombed themselves was one of the prehistoric earthen fortresses that abound in the southwest of Ireland. The tongue of our guide, Jeremiah Donovan, did not weary in the recital of the ways, and the passages, and the little rooms

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

that were within in it. He said that a calf belonging to himself was back in it one time for a week, and she came out three times fatter than the day she went in. He also, but with a certain diffidence, mentioned fairies.

Round and about this place of mystery went Flurry, blowing long and dreary blasts at the mouths of its many holes, uttering "Gone-away" screeches, of a gaiety deplorably at variance with his furious countenance.

After a period of time which I was too much deadened by misery to compute, Flurry appeared and said he was going home. Judging by his appearance, he had himself been to ground. What he said about the white hounds and the weather was very suitable, but would not read as well as it sounded.

We returned to the farmyard with the wind and rain chivying us from behind. While Hickey was getting out the hounds, my horse shivered with cold and gave an ominous cough. I reflected on the twelve long miles that lay between him and home, and asked if I could get a warm drink for him. There was no difficulty about that; to be sure I could and welcome. I abandoned my comrades; regret, if it were felt, was not expressed by Mr. Knox. I put my horse into the cow-house, and before the hounds had accomplished half a mile of their direful progress, I was standing with my back to a glowing turf fire, with my coat hanging on a chair, and a cup of scalding tea irradiating the inmost recesses of my person.

My hostess, Mrs. Jeremiah Donovan, was a handsome young woman, tall, fair, flushed, agonised with hospitality, shy to ferocity. The family dog was lifted from the hearth with a side kick worthy of an International football match; her offspring, clustered, staring, in the chimney corner, were dispersed with a scorching whisper, of which the words "ye brazen tinkers," gave some clue to its general trend, and

"THE WHITEBOYS"

I was left alone with an excellent cake of soda-bread and two boiled eggs.

Presently a slight and mouse-like rattle made me aware that one of the offspring, aged about five, had returned, and was secretly drawing my whip to him along the floor by the thong.

"What have ye the whip for?" enquired the offspring, undaunted by discovery.

"To bate the dogs with," I replied, attuning my speech to his as best I could.

"Is it the big white dogs?" pursued the offspring.

I paused midway in a mouthful of soda-bread. "Did you see the white dogs?" I asked very gently.

"God knows I did!" said the offspring, warming to his work, "an' they snapped the bit o' bread out o' Joola's hand within in the cow-house! And Joola said they were a fright!"

I sat still and waited while one might count five, fearful of scaring the bird that had perched so near me.

"Are the white dogs here now?" I ventured, wooingly.

"They are not."

The crook of my crop was beginning to prove dangerously engrossing, and the time was short.

"Where did they go?" I persevered.

"Jimmy Mahony and me Uncle Lukey took them away in the van," said the offspring with clearness and simplicity, slashing with my whip at a member of the guild of Brazen Tinkers whom I assumed to be the already injured Julia.

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As I bestowed at parting a benefaction upon Jeremiah Donovan, I said that I hoped he would let Mr. Knox know if any of the white hounds came out of the fort. He assured me that he would do so. He was, like his wife, a thoroughly good fellow, and he had wisped my horse until one would have said he had never been out of the stable.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

The storm had blown itself away, and the rain was nearly over. I rode home quietly, and in peace and goodwill towards all men; after all, there was no hurry. This was a thing that was going to last me for the rest of my life, and Flurry's.

I overtook Michael on the way home. Michael said that sure he knew all through it was a drag, and if Mr. Flurry had been said by him, he'd have had neither cut, shuffle, nor deal with them O'Reillys. In the course of his life Michael has never been known to be in the wrong.

Dr. Hickey told me (but this was some time afterwards) that he often had to get out of his bed to laugh, when he thought of Flurry getting Jeremiah Donovan to screech in Irish down the holes in the fort, for fear old O'Reilly's hounds had no English.

Flurry was lost to home and country for three days. It was darkly said that he had gone to Fahoura to break every bone in young O'Reilly's body, and, incidentally, to bring back the white hounds. At the end of three days he telegraphed for a man and a saddle to meet the afternoon train. There was nothing in the telegram about hounds. Next day I met him riding a young brown horse, with a wildish eye, and a nasty rub from a misfitting collar.

"I got him in a sort of a swap," said Flurry, tranquilly.

"I suppose he got that rub in the bread-van?" I remarked, drawing a bow at a venture.

"Well, that might be too," assented Flurry, regarding me with an eye that was like a stone wall with broken glass on the top.

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT, HIGHWAYMAN

By A. QUILLER COUCH

THE jury re-entered the court after half an hour's consultation.

It all comes back to me as vividly as though I stood in the dock at this very moment. The dense fog that hung over the well of the court; the barristers' wigs that bobbed up through it, and were drowned again in that seething cauldron; the rays of the guttering candles (for the murder-trial had lasted far into the evening) that loomed through it and wore a sickly halo; the red robes and red face of my lord judge opposite that stared through it and outshone the candles; the black crowd around, seen mistily; the voice of the usher calling "Silence!"; the shuffling of the jurymen's feet; the pallor on their faces as I leant forward and tried to read the verdict on them; the very smell of the place, compound of fog, gaol-fever, the close air, and the dinners eaten earlier in the day by the crowd—all this strikes home upon me as sharply as it then did, after the numb apathy of waiting.

As the jury huddled into their places I stole a look at my counsel. He paused for a moment from his task of trimming a quill, shot a quick glance at the foreman's face, and then went on cutting as coolly as ever.

"Gentlemen of the jury"—it was the judge's voice—"are you agreed upon your verdict?"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"We are."

"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

It must have been full a minute, as I leant back clutching the rail in front of me, before I saw anything but the bleared eyes of the candles, or heard anything but a hoarse murmur from the crowd. But as soon as the court ceased to heave, and I could stare about me, I looked towards my counsel again.

He was still shaping his pen. He made no motion to come forward and shake hands over my acquittal, for which he had worked untiringly all day. He did not even offer to speak. He just looked up, nodded carelessly, and turned to his junior beside him; but in that glance I had read something which turned my heart cold, then sick, within me, and from that moment my hatred of the man was as deep as hell.

In the fog outside I got clear of the gaping crowd, but the chill of the night after that heated court pierced my very bones. I had on the clothes I had been taken in. It was June then, and now it was late in October. I remember that on the day when they caught me I wore my coat open for coolness. Four months and a half had gone out of my life. Well, I had money enough in my pocket to get a greatcoat; but I must put something warm inside me first, to get out the chill that cursed lawyer had laid on my heart.

I had purposely chosen the by-lanes of the town, but I remembered a certain tavern—the "Lamb and Flag"—which lay down a side alley. Presently the light from its windows struck across the street, ahead. I pushed open the door and entered.

The small bar was full of people newly come from the court, and discussing the trial in all its bearings. In the babel I heard a dozen different opinions given in as many seconds, and learnt enough, too, to make me content with

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

the jury I had had. But the warmth of the place was pleasant, and I elbowed my way forward to the counter.

There was a woman standing by the door as I entered, who looked curiously at me for a moment, then turned to nudge a man at her side, and whisper. The whisper grew as I pressed forward, and before I could reach the counter a hand was laid on my shoulder from behind. I turned.

"Well?" said I.

It was a heavy-looking drover that had touched me.

"Are you the chap that was tried to-day for murder of Jeweller Todd?" he asked.

"Well?" said I again, but I could see the crowd falling back, as if I was a leper, at his question.

"Well? 'T aint well then, as I reckon, to be making so free with respectable folk."

There was a murmur of assent from the mouths turned towards me. The landlord came forward from behind the bar.

"I was acquitted," I urged defiantly.

"Ac-quitted!" said he, with big scorn in the syllables. "Hear im now—'ac-quitted!' Landlord, is this a respectable house?"

The landlord gave his verdict.

"H'out yer goes, and damn yer impudence!"

I looked round, but their faces were all dead against me.

"H'out yer goes!" repeated the landlord. "And think yer-self lucky it aint worse," added the drover.

With no further defence I slunk out into the night once more.

A small crowd of children (Heaven knows whence or how they gathered) followed me up the court and out into the street. Their numbers swelled as I went on, and some began to hoot and pelt me; but when I gained the top of the hill, and a lonelier district, I turned and struck among them with my stick. It did my heart good to hear their screams.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

After that I was let alone, and tramped forward past the scattered houses, towards the open country and the moors. Up here there was scarcely any fog, but I could see it, by the rising moon, hanging like a shroud over the town below. The next town was near upon twelve miles off, but I do not remember that I thought of getting so far. I could not have thought at all, in fact, or I should hardly have taken the high-road upon which the jeweller had been stopped and murdered.

There was a shrewd wind blowing, and I shivered all over; but the cold at my heart was worse, and my hate of the man who had set it there grew with every step. I thought of the four months and more which parted the two lives of Gabriel Foot, and what I should make of the new one. I had my chance again—a chance gained for me beyond hope by that counsel but for whom I should be sleeping to-night in the condemned cell; a chance, and a good chance, but for that same cursed lawyer. Ugh! how cold it was, and how I hated *him* for it!

There was a little whitewashed cottage on the edge of the moorland just after the hedgerows ceased—the last house before the barren heath began, standing a full three hundred yards from any other dwelling. Its front faced the road, and at the back an outhouse and a wretched garden jutted out on the waste land. There was a light in each of its windows to-night, and as I passed down the road I heard the dismal music of a flute.

Perhaps it was this that jogged my thoughts and woke them up to my present pass. At any rate, I had not gone more than twenty yards before I turned and made for the door. The people might give me a night's lodging in the outhouse; at any rate, they would not refuse a crust to stay the fast which I had not broken since the morning. I tapped gently with my knuckles on the door, and listened.

I waited five minutes, and no one answered. The flute

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

still continued its melancholy tune; it was evidently in the hands of a learner, for the air (a dispiriting one enough at the best) kept breaking off suddenly and repeating itself. But the performer had patience, and the sound never ceased for more than two seconds at a time. Besides this, nothing could be heard. The blinds were drawn in all the windows. The glow of the candles through them was cheerful enough, but nothing could be seen of the house inside. I knocked a second time, and a third, with the same result. Finally, tired of this, I pushed open the low gate which led into the garden behind, and stole round to the back of the cottage.

Here, too, the window on the ground floor was lit up behind its blinds, but that of the room above was shuttered. There was a hole in the shutter, however, where a knot of the wood had fallen out, and a thin shaft of light stretched across the blackness and buried itself in a ragged yew-tree at the end of the garden. From the loudness of the sounds I judged this to be the room where the flute-playing was going on. The crackling of my footsteps on the thin soil did not disturb the performer, so I gathered a handful of earth and pitched it up against the pane. The flute stopped for a minute or so, but just as I was expecting to see the shutter open, went on again: this time the air was "Pretty Polly Oliver."

I crept back again, and began to hammer more loudly at the door. "Come," said I, "whoever this may be inside, I'll see for myself at any rate," and with that I lifted the latch and gave the door a heavy kick. It flew open quite easily (it had not even been locked), and I found myself in a low kitchen. The room was empty, but the relics of supper lay on the deal table, and the remains of what must have been a noble fire were still smouldering on the hearthstone. A crazy, rusty blunderbuss hung over the fireplace. This, with a couple of rough chairs, a broken bacon-rack, and a small side-table, completed the furniture of the place. No; for as

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

I sat down to make a meal off the remnants of supper, something lying on the lime-ash floor beneath this side-table caught my eye. I stepped foward and picked it up.

It was a barrister's wig.

"This is queer business," thought I; and I laid it on the table opposite me as I went on with my supper. It was a "gossan" wig, as we call it in our parts; a wig grown yellow and rusty with age and wear. It looked so sly and wicked as it lay there, and brought back the events of the day so sharply that a queer dread took me of being discovered with it. I had pulled out my pistol, loaded it (they had given me back both the powder and pistol found on me when I was taken), and laid it beside my plate. This done, I went on with my supper—it was an excellent cold capon—and all the time the flute upstairs kept toot-tooting without stopping, except to change the tune. It gave me "Hearts of Oak," "Why, Soldiers, Why?" "Like Hermit Poor," and "Come, Lasses and Lads," before I had fairly cleared the dish.

"And now," thought I, "I have had a good supper; but there are still three things to be done. In the first place I want drink, in the second I want a bed, and in the third I want to thank this kind person, whoever he is, for his hospitality. I'm not going to begin life No. 2 with house-breaking."

I rose, slipped the pistol into my tail-pocket, and followed the sound up the ramshackle stairs. My footsteps made such a racket on their old timbers as fairly to frighten me, but it never disturbed the flute player. He had harked back again to "Like Hermit Poor" by this time, and the dolefulness of it was fit to make the dead cry out, but he went whining on until I reached the head of the stairs and struck a rousing knock on the door.

The playing stopped. "Come in," said a cheery voice; but it gave me no cheerfulness. Instead of that, it sent all the

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

comfort of my supper clean out of me, as I opened the door and saw *him* sitting there.

There he was, the man who had saved my neck that day, and whom most I hated in the world, sitting before a snug fire, with his flute on his knee, a glass of port wine at his elbow, and looking so comfortable, with that knowing light in his grey eyes, that I could have killed him where he sat.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, just the very least bit surprised and no more. "Come in."

I stood in the doorway hesitating.

"Don't stay letting in that monstrous draught, man; but sit down. You'll find the bottle on the table and a glass on the shelf."

I poured out a glassful and drank it off. The stuff was rare (I can remember its trick on the tongue to this day), but somehow it did not drive the cold out of my heart. I took another glass, and sat sipping it and staring from the fire to my companion.

He had taken up the flute again, and was blowing a few deep notes out of it, thoughtfully enough. He was a small, squarely-built man, with a sharp ruddy face like a frozen pippin, heavy grey eyebrows, and a mouth like a trap when it was not pursed up for that everlasting flute. As he sat there with his wig off, the crown of his bald head was fringed with an obstinate-looking patch of hair, the colour of a badger's. My amazement at finding him here at this hour, and alone, was lost in my hatred of the man as I saw the depths of complacent knowledge in his face. I felt that I must kill him sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

Presently he laid down his flute again and spoke:—

"I scarcely expected you."

I grunted something in answer.

"But I might have known something was up, if I'd only paid attention to my flute. It and I are not in harmony to-night. It doesn't like the secrets I've been blowing into

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

it; it has heard a lot of queer things in its time, but it's an innocent-minded flute for all that, and I'm afraid that what I've told it to-night is a point beyond what it's prepared to go."

"I take it, it knows a damned deal too much," growled I.

He looked at me sharply for an instant, rose, whistled a bar or two of "Like Hermit Poor," reached down a couple of clay pipes from the shelf, filled one for himself, and gravely handed the other with the tobacco to me.

"Beyond what it is prepared to go," he echoed quietly, sinking back in his chair and puffing at the pipe. "It's a nice point that we have been discussing together, my flute and I, and I won't say but that I've got the worst of it. By the way, what do you mean to do now that you have a fresh start?"

Now I had not tasted tobacco for over four months, and its effect upon my wits was surprising. It seemed to oil my thoughts till they worked without a hitch, and I saw my plan of action marked out quite plainly before me.

"Do you want to know the first step of all?" I asked.

"To be sure; the first step at any rate determines the direction."

"Well then," said I, very steadily, and staring into his face, "the first step of all is that I am going to kill you."

"H'm," said he after a bit, and I declare that not so much as an eyelash of the man shook, "I thought as much. I guessed *that* when you came into the room. And what next?"

"Time enough then to think of 'what next,'" I answered; for though I was set upon blowing his brains out, I longed for him to blaze out into a passion and warm up my blood for the job.

"Pardon me," he said, as coolly as might be, "that would be the very worst time to think of it. For, just consider: in the first place you will already be committed to your way

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

of life, and secondly, if I know anything about you, you would be far too much flurried for any thought worth the name."

There was a twinkle of frosty humour in his eye as he said this, and in the silence which followed I could hear him chuckling to himself, and tasting the words over again as though they were good wine. I sat fingering my pistol and waiting for him to speak again. When he did so, it was with another dry chuckle and a long puff of tobacco smoke.

"As you say, I know a deal too much. Shall I tell you how much?"

"Yes, you may if you'll be quick about it."

"Very well, then, I will. Do you mind passing the bottle? Thank you. I probably know not only too much but a deal more than you guess. First let us take the case for the Crown. The jeweller is travelling by coach at night over the moors. He has one postillion only, Roger Tallis by name, and by character shady. The jeweller has money (he was a niggardly fool to take only one postillion), and carries a diamond of great, or rather of an enormous and notable value (he was a bigger fool to take this). In the dark morning two horses come galloping back, frightened and streaming with sweat. A search party goes out, finds the coach upset by the Four Holed Cross, the jeweller lying beside it with a couple of pistol bullets in him, and the money, the diamond, and Roger Tallis—nowhere. So much for the murdered man. Two or three days after, you, Gabriel Foot, by character also shady, and known to be a friend of Roger Tallis, are whispered to have a suspicious amount of money about you, also bloodstains on your coat. It further leaks out that you were travelling on the moors afoot on the night in question, and that your pistols are soiled with powder. Case for the Crown closes. Have I stated it correctly?"

I nodded; he took a sip or two at his wine, laid down his

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

pipe as if the tobacco spoiled the taste of it, took another sip, and continued:—

“Case for the defence. That Roger Tallis has decamped, that no diamond has been found on you (or anywhere), and lastly that the bullets in the jeweller’s body do not fit your pistols, but came from a larger pair. Not very much of a case, perhaps, but this last is a strong point.”

“Well?” I asked, as he paused.

“Now then for the facts of the case. Would you oblige me by casting a look over there in the corner?”

“I see nothing but a pickaxe and shovel.”

“Ha! very good; ‘nothing but a pickaxe and shovel.’ Well, to resume: facts of the case—Roger Tallis murders the jeweller, and you murder Roger Tallis; after that, as you say, ‘nothing but a pickaxe and shovel.’”

And with this, as I am a living sinner, the rosy-faced old boy took up his flute and blew a stave or two of “Come, Lasses and Lads.”

“Did you dig him up?” I muttered hoarsely; and although deathly cold I could feel a drop of sweat trickling down my forehead and into my eye.

“What, before the trial? My good sir, you have a fair, a very fair, aptitude for crime, but believe me, you have much to learn both of legal etiquette and of a lawyer’s conscience.” And for the first time since I came in I saw something like indignation on his ruddy face.

“Now,” he continued, “I either know too much or not enough. Obviously I know enough for you to wish, and perhaps wisely, to kill me. The question is, whether I know enough to make it worth your while to spare me. I think I do; but that is for you to decide. If I put you to-night, and in half an hour’s time, in possession of property worth ten thousand pounds, will that content you?”

“Come, come,” I said, “you need not try to fool me, nor think I am going to let you out of my sight.”

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

"You misunderstand. I desire neither; I only wish a bargain. I am ready to pledge you my word to make no attempt to escape before you are in possession of that property, and to offer no resistance to your shooting me in case you fail to obtain it, provided on the other hand you pledge your word to spare my life should you succeed within half an hour. And, my dear sir, considering the relative value of your word and mine, I think it must be confessed you have the better of the bargain."

I thought for a moment. "Very well then," said I, "so be it; but if you fail——"

"I know what happens," replied he.

With that he blew a note or two on his flute, took it to pieces, and carefully bestowed it in the tails of his coat. I put away my pistol in mine.

"Do you mind shouldering that spade and pickaxe, and following me?" he asked. I took them up in silence. He drained his glass and put on his hat.

"Now I think we are ready. Stop a moment."

He reached across for the glass which I had emptied, took it up gingerly between thumb and forefinger, and tossed it with a crash on to the hearthstone. He then did the same to my pipe, after first snapping the stem into halves. This done, he blew out one candle, and with great gravity led the way down the staircase. I shouldered the tools and followed, while my heart hated him with a fiercer spite than ever.

We passed down the crazy stairs and through the kitchen. The candles were still burning there. As my companion glanced at the supper-table, "M'm," he said, "not a bad beginning of a new leaf. My friend, I will allow you exactly twelve months in which to get hanged."

I made no answer, and we stepped out into the night. The moon was now up, and the high-road stretched like a white ribbon into the gloom. The cold wind bore up a few heavy

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

clouds from the northwest, but for the most part we could see easily enough. We trudged side by side along the road in silence, except that I could hear my companion every now and then whistling softly to himself.

As we drew near the Four Holed Cross and the scene of the murder I confess to an uneasy feeling and a desire to get past the place with all speed. But the lawyer stopped by the very spot where the coach was overturned, and held up a finger as if to call attention. It was a favourite trick of his with the jury.

"This was where the jeweller lay. Some fifteen yards off there was another pool of blood. Now the jeweller must have dropped instantly for he was shot through the heart. Yet no one doubted but that the other pool of blood was his. Fools!"

With this he turned off the road at right angles, and began to strike rapidly across the moor. At first I thought he was trying to escape me, but he allowed me to catch him up readily enough, and then I knew the point for which he was making. I followed doggedly. Clouds began to gather over the moon's face, and every now and then I stumbled heavily on the uneven ground; but he moved along nimbly enough, and even cried "Shoo!" in a sprightly voice when a startled plover flew up before his feet. Presently, after we had gone about five hundred yards on the heath, the ground broke away into a little hollow, where a rough track led down to the Lime Kilns and the thinly wooded stream that washed the valley below. We followed this track for ten minutes or so, and presently the masonry of the disused kilns peered out, white in the moonlight, from between the trees.

There were three of these kilns standing close together beside the path; but my companion without hesitation pulled up almost beneath the very arch of the first, peered about, examined the ground narrowly, and then motioned to me.

"Dig here."

STATEMENT OF GABRIEL FOOT

"If we both know well enough what is underneath, what is the use of digging?"

"I very much doubt if we do," said he. "You had better dig."

I can feel the chill creeping down my back as I write of it; but at the time, though I well knew the grisly sight which I was to discover, I dug away steadily enough. The man who had surprised my secret set himself down on a dark bank of ferns at about ten paces' distance, and began to whistle softly, though I could see his fingers fumbling with his coat-tails as though they itched to be at the flute again.

The moon's rays shone fitfully upon the white face of the kiln, and lit up my work. The little stream rushed noisily below. And so, with this hateful man watching, I laid bare the lime-burnt remains of the comrade whom, almost five months before, I had murdered and buried there. How I had then cursed my luck because forced to hide his corpse away before I could return and search for the diamond I had failed to find upon his body! But as I tossed the earth and lime aside, and discovered my handiwork, the moon's rays were suddenly caught and reflected from within the pit, and I fell forward with a short gasp of delight.

For there, kindled into quick shafts and points of colour—violet, green, yellow, and fieriest red—lay the missing diamond among Roger's bones. As I clutched the gem a black shadow fell between the moon and me. I looked up. My companion was standing over me, with the twinkle still in his eye and the flute in his hand.

"You were a fool not to guess that he had swallowed it. I hope you are satisfied with the bargain. As we are not, I trust, likely to meet again in this world, I will here bid you *Adieu*, though possibly that is scarcely the word to use. But there is one thing I wish to tell you. I owe you a debt to-night for having prevented me from committing a crime.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

You saw that I had the spade and pickaxe ready in the cottage. Well, I confess I lusted for that gem. I was arguing out the case with my flute when you came in."

"If," said I, "you wish a share——"

"Another word," he interrupted very gravely, "and I shall be forced to think that you insult me. As it is, I am grateful to you for supporting my flute's advice at an opportune moment. I will now leave you. Two hours ago I was in a fair way of becoming a criminal. I owe it to you, and to my flute, that I am still merely a lawyer. Farewell!"

With that he turned on his heel and was gone with a swinging stride up the path and across the moor. His figure stood out upon the sky-line for a moment, and then vanished. But I could hear for some time the tootle-tootle of his flute in the distance, and it struck me that its note was unusually sprightly and clear.

DESTINY AND A DOG

By GRACE RHYS

MY large uncle, fresh of face, and clothed in a vast coat of pilot cloth, was putting his pair of bays at the hill.

"See the big Bassoon now, child; look at him how he takes the hill!"

He loosed a finger on the rein, and with a bold lunge Bassoon started his collar-companion and the double dog-cart at a rush up the slope.

The sound was good of the eight hoofs beating the road in a hearty rhythm. I could hear the ripple of the mud and water that spirted behind in our tracks. The black hedges twinkled with water drops as they slid past, and the cold air was sweeter than honey under the grey sky. Like a bad dream, the memory of those oppressions,—of the hospital nurse and the sick room and the rattle of town, slipped from me, as I saw unwinding the pattern of that Irish country of the mid-west;—lake and wood, cottages of white and tawny gold, (darker now for the rain;) and fields dotted here and there with cattle, here and there with sheep.

But that pup. I must know about him. Five years since I had seen him, a round ball of delight. My grandmother had been alive then.

"Where's Rob?" I said, turning round to Caylaher; pleased to look again at that familiar face, swarthy, twinkling eyed; and remembering how I used to ride on his shoulder, one small hand clutched in his curly hair.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"He's at this minute listening for our wheels, miss; soon you'll see him." And I did; but not till after we turned in at the gate. There he was, by the hall-door, stretched upon his four powerful legs as though standing for a show:—a noble collie, tawny and dark brown; head full-formed, large eye, and well carried tail, feathered with tawny white.

Stiffly I climbed down and went to him: when I tried to pat his head, he moved away and looked me up and down with a cold eye. "He's a very independent dog, miss," said Catherine, my grandmother's woman, apologetically.

From that moment I laid siege to Rob; I invaded the kitchen and begged and stole dainties; I carried them to him as he lay, his head between his paws, on the lawn or the gravel sweep. He used to look critically at my offerings, bolt them in two chops of his jaws, turn his back upon me and lie down again.

He was mighty beautiful. He was, too, a much respected dog, with powers. I wished he would love me.

One day, in early April, I sat on the lawn, brushing his coat. Caylaher came out to take his plate.

"It's all no use," I said to him sadly. "He doesn't even care for cold chicken. Here's three months I've been working at him."

"He's not that sort of dog, miss. I could have told you. He's been reared different. Sure dogs were never fed in the front here nor in the rooms. Once a day behind the kitchen door—that's his sort. He knows the master doesn't like it,—the best china plates and all. And that's the master's coat-brush. You'd better give it to me, miss, for Catherine to wash it. Frank does him once a week in the stable and I looking on for fear he'd ate him."

"Would he bite then?"

"Once he took a small piece out of Frank's leg when he interfered too far," said Caylaher indulgently, "but in a general way he never would bite anny but evildoers."

DESTINY AND A DOG

"And how should he know them?"

"God knows, miss, for I don't. He'd know a thief half a mile off, but a good poor man he would treat with respect. He knows more than we know. And he's faithful. He'd die for the master. Or for me either for the matter of that. You treat him different, miss. Leave him alone and he'll come to you."

Good; thought I. I will give up these feminine blandishments. Three months of them! What a dog of iron!

Two mornings after I was sitting in the dining room window, looking across at the plate of hot scones which Caylaher had just added to the breakfast arrangements. The door was pushed open and to my amazement Rob walked in. Bassoon would hardly have startled me more. He came up to me and laughed in my face; his ears were cocked, his head on one side; his tail waved, he looked enormous. As plain as possible he said, "Where's them bones and them little lunches you've been forgetting?" The master's step sounded, his door squeaked; just time for the law-breaker to catch a hot scone; he did; then, vanished tail down from the room, making himself small as he went.

I remained amazed; never, I am sure, had Rob shown such a grin to either of his man-gods. How well he had broken his discipline for me, saying, "That woman thing is fond, she breaks the rules with her china plates and her bones and her brushes where none of these things should be. Therefore she will welcome me into the forbidden room. For now that my adored Caylaher has stopped all lighter refreshments, I had better try her on another line." I was half enchanted, half sorry. His pride has been so noble. Now we had a secret low understanding and many was the hot scone he came by before our little game was discovered. One day my uncle caught us; one word to the dog, half-a-dozen to me and we never transgressed again.

It was certainly a very masculine house. Though my

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

grandmother's spirit, witty and warmly pious, survived in every form of the daily rule yet I was aware of a slow sort of ebb as though some vital warmth that had inhabited the house and spread itself abroad, was slowly withdrawing. There certainly was no fostering of spirits under my uncle's rule. He neither saw nor felt the movements of the minds of those that surrounded him. About this time the people began to use me as a go-between; and in a cheerful, manly way I found my uncle perfectly indifferent to their well-being. For instance, Caylaher's rheumatism was getting troublesome. Would the master take Frank on a wet day? or put up the horses when we were visiting and it rained? Catherine had not had a night off in five years: she the chief priestess of that altar, the table. The beef and mutton, the turkeys and ducks and fowls she had offered up during that time would have crowded out a field.

It was the same thing with Rob. He used to come up to me now sometimes and stand and look into my eyes like a prisoner seeking to get outside his bars. He was of Highland strain was Rob. He must have wild impulses in his blood, half recollections of mountain gallopings, of long days after the sheep, of the friendly shepherd's hearth at night.

Here he had nothing to do in this pretty little cut up country. Beyond the guarding of the house and place he had but one job, self-imposed. If we drove late, we always found him on the road at dusk or dark, ready to steer us home. How he found us was a mystery to my uncle. He never went with us; he was too much a fighting dog for my uncle's taste; but sure as the dark fell, even if it was in the next county, there was Rob with his one short bark of greeting at the wheel side. After that he would run on before us, the white feathered tail as good as a lamp in the darkness. However he found us, I never knew him to miss. But now in the long evenings he had little to do.

"Caylaher," I said one day, "do you think Rob is bored?"

DESTINY AND A DOG

"He might, miss," said Caylaher cautiously, looking at the dog where he lay at our feet, his head between his paws.

"He doesn't get exercise. I wonder if the Master will let him come with us sometimes."

"He won't, miss." The dog cocked an ear and turned an eye upon us. He understood. Caylaher and I mutually averted our eyes from each other; had not Caylaher stood two hours in the rain before Woodford House yesterday, while we talked of God knows what in full view of him? When I tackled my uncle I could feel him wilfully drawing in his sympathies, (because they once had hurt him;) gathering himself into a ball and hardening himself;—he, a kind man and a good one; son too, of a saint and a humorous saint—the rarest variety!

June was in very gorgeously with a succession of cloudless nights, and a full golden moon. On one of them I woke to hear a hideous noise. The room was full of moonlight. The pattern of leaves and large yellow roses at the window lay painted in deep sapphire blue upon the floor. Through those moonlit gates came the frightful howling of a dog. I got up; there was Rob on the gravel, baying the moon. He sat on his haunches, a dark wolf-like idol of a thing, his body, neck and head all strained upwards to a point, the sharp point of his muzzle; then his jaws opened; as the roses gave forth their perfume so he emitted his intolerable howl. Dogs answered from far away and Spanish asses brayed. Was he at worship? Or was the spirit in him that knew all the rage and cruelty, the bloody wars of life, accusing the climbing perfection of the moon? Already my eighteen years knew something of the savagery that suddenly leaps out from behind smooth surfaces; of hatred darkening behind a smile; of murder that rests his chin upon a wall; of envy, ready for action, that would tear a possessor; of lust, that eternally hunts a prey, and there was even more than this in the howl; there was grief; grief of the spirit

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

at the terrible necessities. Might not a great wolf grieve in his dreams after he has torn the flock?

"Rob," I whispered, "stop that abominable noise, get out." He came over and stood and looked up at me. I could see his friendly eyes shining. Then he trotted off down the drive and I heard him again some distance off.

I was more than ever in love with life that night, discovering in myself some half concealed appetite for the terrors of life; howls and roses, I was ready for both.

A day or two after this, a young man of fine sounding name and too lively reputation called on us. My uncle, whose sense of propriety was both strong and original, made no move to introduce us. The tabooed one looked at me and I looked at him; the situation was too absurd, so I slipped away.

Now was my chance to get a walk, and alone. I set off rejoicing for my cousin's old house some two miles off. Two little lakes I had to pass that lay, like blue and silver shields dropped down by warring archangels. As I passed the second one Rob trotted out in front of me on the road. I flew to him and praised him; he had never come so far with me before. Would he come all the way?

When the road branched off, shaded by beeches, he waited a moment then turned off the way I meant to go. My heart was filled with pride. Rob had taken me on at last.

My cousin seemed surprised to see me. "Alone?" she said. "And walking? on a market day? Did your uncle know of it?"

I explained about the magnificent reprobate. "How like him!" she said.

"But I'm not alone," I went on triumphantly, "Rob is with me."

She was impressed. "But our dogs will be at him," she said.

"They are."

I drew her to the window; there was Rob lying on the

DESTINY AND A DOG

gravel, pretending to be asleep. About him side-stepped three large brutes, bristling and growling in a sort of jazz dance.

She would not let me stay long. "People will be coming back from market," she said, "and many of them drunk. Our horses are working or I would send you home."

I laughed at her. In all my life, I assured her, I had never met with rudeness in Ireland. "My dear," she said, "do you know there are fourteen public houses in that one village street?"

Rob was more independent than ever on the way home. The ditches seemed to be full of things that interested him. Once only he passed me. The rest of the time he was out of sight, and I forgot to think about him as I followed the turnings and windings of the beautiful road. Now and then I met a cart; or a group of women passed, walking together: we said "Fine evening" enthusiastically, though it was only four o'clock.

Then came a turn in the road, and I saw three men coming joyously along. Their faces were red, they were talking loudly, and they seemed to be walking on india rubber.

"Fine evening," they said; then by a sort of after thought, one of them got in front of me and said in a friendly simple way, "Come now, will ye give us a kiss?" I was amazed and stepped backwards. Then the three rascals linked hands and made a line across the road. Not a soul was in sight.

I turned and looked back. No one to be seen: but round the bend came a small cloud of dust and a wild creature in it, travelling at desperate speed; in a moment Rob passed me, rose in the air to the height of a man's shoulder, and hurled himself at the throat of the man nearest me. He seemed to strike, for the man yelled,—a low yell of terror, and staggered and nearly fell.

With a smack and a slide Rob lit some six feet away, then turned and made after the men, who scattered and

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

dived and ran in frantic fear. Rob drove them this way and that, one through the hedge, one into a field, one down the road. Then in a moment he was back at my side; he just glanced in my face, as cool as you please, not even panting. He pulled himself away from me, and then went on hunting the ditches as usual.

It was a discreet house, my Uncle's. To Catherine in private, I imparted the tale. Caylaher was her brother, so it quickly leaked out. It added much to Rob's almost supernatural reputation.

Now remembering that scene, I am still amazed. Catherine told me afterwards that the men were known, and had each a little keepsake from Rob. Such things rarely happen in Ireland; strange that revenge should have overtaken them in such instant shape. Anything so silent, swift, and savage as that attack I had never dreamed of.

"Caylaher," I said, "does Rob know when it's market day?"

"He does, miss," said Caylaher demurely, his eyes cast down. "He does be amusing himself, watching the people on the road down by the gate."

"Would he know a man that was tipsy by the sound of his steps at a great distance?"

"He has his ears on sticks all the time, miss."

"How much of the English language does he know?"

"Pretty near all of it."

"Then he has the mind of a man?"

"Well, he has no religion, miss," said Caylaher doubtfully.

Ah well, there is not much more to tell of Rob. As autumn drew on, he seemed to retire into himself, to grow more morose.

One day my Uncle said to Caylaher,

"Where's Rob?"

"I have him tied in the old stable, sir."

"Why have you him tied?"

DESTINY AND A DOG

"There's some two-three men complaining their sheep do be run of a morning early," said Caylaher, busy at the side-board, his back turned, and speaking cheerfully. That was all.

Again a few days after.

"Rob got out the night before last, sir: bit his straps through."

There was a long pause.

"Well, Caylaher?"

"There's a mountainy man been here this morning. Says he has two sheep killed on him."

Now the mountain was twenty miles away.

"Was he seen?"

"He was, sir."

A long silence. Then, in a very low voice, "Will he have to go, Caylaher?"

"I'm afraid he'll have to go," almost in a whisper.

That was all I ever heard from those two. It was Catherine who told me the end.

Caylaher would not shoot him. He said Rob knew too much about a gun. He would never forgive him if he pointed a gun at him.

So he took him out fishing, as he sometimes did, when we wanted perch for breakfast.

I can see now, as plain as plain, the picture of the dog in dark outline, sitting up in the boat opposite the man, watching him fish, his ears cocked, and sometimes licking his lips. I can see (from how far away!) the little lake in its grey and silver beauty, under a clouded sky; the water of it is very pure and clear with a glistening surface. The bed of it is sand and little stones. Always a heron or two stand fishing on one leg beside the reeds, and the little water hens nod their red-flecked polls as they scoot across, with their clucking cry. That is the only sound except the noise made by the jumping fish.

Caylaher had a large stone in the boat with one end of a

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

rope tied to it, and a coat over all. Rob liked a perch as much as any one else. Caylaher caught a couple of fish; then he tied the end of the rope round those powerful curved flanks. Perhaps he put his hand on the dog's head for a moment. I do not know. Perhaps he might have been afraid to trouble him by "letting on," as he would have expressed it. Then he threw the perch and bade the dog jump, and as he jumped he hoisted the stone along with him and down he went.

Well, it was a quick death, and a clean death, and a kind death; and many a man might envy it him. And, of course, every one knows that a sheep-biter cannot be allowed to live.

THE MAN IN THE ROOM

By H. D. LOWRY

SHE seemed a child when we were married, and I was resolved she shouldn't learn the bitter meaning of poverty. There were but three weeks of the new life, then parting, and three years of loneliness out in Dakota. The child was born; a year more passed, and it was dead; and very soon Nellie began to write begging me to come home to her. But I was a fool, and didn't look beyond the words; it was only when her father wrote, saying how she grieved for the child, that I gave up trying to save the future, and went back home to Trenoweth.

Nellie was the same as ever: young and pretty, and still so slight and slender that a man could hardly think her a woman, made to bear a woman's burthens. She didn't speak once of the child that was dead, and I let her have her way, though I was longing to hear more of it. Sometimes when I sat with her in the bit of garden-ground, or walked in the lanes that led down to the sea, I could have fancied we two were children again, alone in a new-made world, and knowing nothing of any evil thing.

So it went on till a day in August, when I was working night-chore, and left home a trifle after nine for the mine. 'Twas some small thing had gone wrong with the engines: when I came there I found we couldn't go underground that night; so I turned and went homeward again, glad as a bird to get back to Nellie. Now that I saw her every day I was always loth to be away from her.

I walked back whistling through the narrow lanes, saying a "Goodnight" once or twice to people meeting me, and glad

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

to take note of a score of common things that would have been nothing to me if I had not been abroad so long. There was no moon, and the sky was all done over with a thin mist from the sea; yet there was a sort of glimmering in the air, and a wetness that gathered in great drops on a man's moustache and eyebrows.

And so at last I came in sight of the cottage.

It stood alone, upon the right hand of the road, at the bottom of a little slope. Just beyond it the road went into parts, in the shape of a narrow Y. As I got to the gate I heard a man coming quickly to meet me down the road to the left—out of Trenoweth. I waited standing in the shadow of a great fuchsia-bush that overhung the wall of the garden, and the man came quite close to me, seeming to walk straight towards the gate, before he saw me. Then he stopped suddenly, and I knew who he was; 'twas Neily Matthews, a cousin of Nellie's. There had been a time when I thought he might marry her, but Nellie laughed when I told her of it, "to think I would fancy she would take up with a boy like that!"

He stopped suddenly, like a man startled, and I came forth from under the fuchsia.

"Hullo, Neily!" I said. "Where be goin' this way, an' this time o' night, and in such a tearin' hurry?"

He didn't speak for a moment, and when he found words I thought his voice was strange.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I can't say where I was goin'. I don't know myself. I was just out for a stroll."

I couldn't keep from laughin', to hear him talk like that to a man three years married.

"And alone?" I said. "Young men must be finely changed since my time!"

"Well," he said, and the lie came easier now, "how should one like me keep a secret from a man so wise? To tell the truth, I had a tiff with a girl last night: Jim Roskerby's

THE MAN IN THE ROOM

daughter, that lives up by the mine. All the evening I've been hoping she would come down to Trenoweth, and as she hasn't come I am goin' up to try to get a look at her."

"Art mazed?" I said. "I've been young myself, and a fool, but 'tis ten o'clock. The maid's in bed and sleepin', this long time. Leave her till to-morrow, and since you're here come in and have a bit of supper. There's a light, see: Nellie haven' gone to bed yet."

I couldn't for the life of me understand him. He didn't speak for a minute; then he began to stammer out excuses, shuffling his feet in the dust; and before I could hear what he had to say the door of the house was thrown open, and I could see Nellie standing there against the light. And then Neily was silent in a moment.

Nellie peered into the dark across the little garden.

"Who's there?" she called, and I could tell by her voice she was frightened to hear voices at this time of night.

"All right, Nellie," I cried. "'Tis only me; me an' Neily. I've been asking him to come in and have a bit of supper, but I can't get him to say yes. I suppose you can give us a bit of something? He've got love-troubles, so he tells me; you may depend he won't eat much."

There was a long silence, and I hardly knew her voice when she spoke.

"There's not much," she said. "But he's welcome to what there is. Bring him in."

But Neily wouldn't hear of it; he turned away and went back towards Trenoweth, and I walked up the garden path to where Nellie was waiting at the door. I took her face between my hands to kiss it, and as I touched her a sudden fear took me. I forgot to kiss her, and stepped past into the house without speaking.

And in a moment I knew everything, and all the good in life was dead for me. For the cloth was spread, the lamp well trimmed; and on the table plates were laid for two.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

I stood there like a man turned to stone. Nellie followed me into the room, and for a second she stood numb and white as death. I could feel the struggle she was making as plain as if her heart had been laid bare.

But she was brave and mastered herself.

"Ah!" she said, with a soft laugh. "Canst guess the meanin' of the two plates, and the two chairs drawn to the table? I used to have things to do by daytime when you were away, and so I made shift to forget some part o' my loneliness. But when night came I was forced to sit idle, and I was all the time longin' to have you back. And so supper was always laid for two, and the easiest chair was set before the plate that was not used. I used to linger over supper, thinkin' 'If the door should open, and he come in!' 'Twas foolishness, an' yet I couldn' but do it."

Then she stopped, to see how the lie took me, and I knew that the thing she told was just like what she might have done in truth when I first went away. But I didn't speak, and she began again.

"And now you have come at last, just as I used to fancy! Come and sit down!"

She drew out the easy-chair that was put ready: I sat down, and she made me eat the supper she had prepared for her lover. When a man is wounded unto death 'tis one flash o' ghastly pain, and then the very agony do stun him, and perhaps 'tis a long time before he feels his hurt. 'Twas that way with me.

I sat there dull and stupid, while she talked an' laughed: it was like the old days, when I used to take tea in her father's house and wonder whether I was as old as I seemed to be when I looked at her. For she laughed and played, talking pretty nonsense like a child sitting on the knee of a man that's fond of her. And I knew that it was all play-acting: that she was watching me all the time, and wondering how much I guessed.

THE MAN IN THE ROOM

At last I couldn't bear with it any longer.

"I've got a deal to think about to-night, Nellie," I said. "Would 'ee mind leaving me an' goin' to bed? I've a deal to think about."

I could see the fear in her face; but she couldn't afford to be weak and in a moment she had thrown it off. "Ah!" she said. "'Tis no good for a married woman to look for compliments. Don't 'ee sit up much longer: 'tis eleven o'clock already. Promise me you won't be long."

She put her two arms about my neck and kissed me upon the lips. I might have been her lover, and I came near to saying so. "Good night," she said, and I turned and watched her mount the stairs.

I heard her moving about in the room overhead, and it seemed as if I could see every movement that she made. Then there was quietness—she was praying—and in a minute or two she was in bed, and I was wondering what a man ought to do when he was treated as I had been. I couldn't think. I sat there hour after hour, until the lamp burned low and the stink of it filled the room; and all that I could do was to speak the name of her falseness over and over again to myself. There was no need of that: I had understood it from the moment when I stepped across the threshold; but the news had stunned me like a blow, so that I couldn't go beyond it and think out plans for the future. So at last I rose and went upstairs, taking a lighted candle in my hand.

Nellie was lying with her eyes closed; the counterpane flung back a little, and her black hair all a-tumble on the pillow. I stood beside her, shading the candle with my hand; I couldn't believe that it was true, for she still had that look of an unstained child, and her breast rose and fell lightly with the come-and-go of her breath. But as I turned away there was a little sound which told me she was not sleeping, and that she found it hard to master herself

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

and fool me while I stood watching her so long. And then again my heart was hardened against her; I knew it was all true, and that this falseness was her very nature.

I threw off my clothes, and put out the light; in a moment I was lying beside her, and again I knew that she was only shamming sleep.

I lay there trying to think what I should do, and every moment longing to cry out to her that I knew she was watching me, and all her falseness. I can't tell 'ee how long a time this lasted, but by-and-by I knew she was really sleeping, and a change came over me; it was like the loosing of a string strained to breaking. Yet I couldn't sleep; I lay there staring at the ceiling, a voice within me saying over and over again that Nellie was false.

I could fancy a dead man lying like that in his grave, and waiting for the judgment. But Nellie slept soft as a little child beside me.

This must have lasted a long time, for I noticed presently that the window-square was paling. It was just before the dawn, and a small wind was whining about the house. And suddenly the door opened without a sound, and a man stepped into the room. 'Twas a strange thing, but somehow I didn't move nor speak; but I mind I wondered how he had opened the door so noiselessly, for a hinge of it was broken and always screeched.

The man came inside and closed the door behind him; then he moved about the room, not making a sound. I didn't see the face of him; to tell the truth, I didn't think of noticing it. I lay and watched him, as a sick child half asleep 'll watch his mother moving about his bed.

He moved to and fro in the room. Then he came and stood beside the bed, looking down upon Nellie. Her arm was flung up, with one hand under her head, her lips just parted, and the long lashes black against her cheek. The first greyness of the dawn came through the white window-

THE MAN IN THE ROOM

blind; and somewhere in the country outside a cock crowed faintly. There was no other sound.

The man stood watching her, like a shadow of the night; and I lay with my eyes upon him, not moving hand nor foot.

She lay so quiet and untroubled, I wondered presently what he thought of her: whether in his judgment also she seemed like an innocent child that sins all the more grievously because of its innocence. But all at once Nellie made a quick movement in her sleep.

"Neily!" she cried, and I guessed what had been her dream, and why she had called her lover's name in such tones of fear. She knew that I knew.

Then the man that stood watching her turned away from the bed and walked to and fro in the room; I could see that he was looking for something, he hardly knew what.

But I knew. Hanging up against the wall there was a sharp-bladed knife, which I had carried in Dakota, and which had been put there for want of a better place when I came home. I watched the man, and I watched the knife; and presently he seemed not so much to see it as to remember it. He took it from the nail and tried the point against his palm. He stood thinking for a little while; then he came back to the bed and looked down on Nellie.

And I lay watching him, as I might have watched a shadow on the wall. I didn't think to notice his face.

A long time passed.

Then all at once Nellie stirred again in her sleep and flung her head back on the pillow, stretching her arms above her. The coverlet fell back and her white breast shone dimly in the grey.

The man took one step forward and struck. . . .

And I screamed aloud as I flung the dagger from me across the room. God knows it was not I who murdered her. Yet I was alone with my dead.

THE TURRET ROOM

By ETHEL COLBURN MAYNE

I

AS Nellie Burke, coming home, drove up the shabby avenue of Duneera Castle, she saw her two younger sisters, each with a man, turn into the little path that led to the boat-house. They did not see nor hear her; the governess-cart was hidden by the summer leafage, and Nellie was driving so dejectedly that wheels and pony's hoofs made hardly any sound. She watched the four as they went gaily on amid the sunlight and the movement of green branches; it was a June day of precarious loveliness, but the girls, she noted, wore their quite new muslin frocks. That held meaning for her—meant that Geraldine and Kate had known that the two men were coming out this afternoon. They had not "said a word" to Nellie, but had let her go into the town after lunch for marketing, and thus return too late.

Nellie was glad of her lateness. Now she could, unmortified, go up to her own room and have her tea there; while if she had arrived before the river-party started, her programme would have been the same, embittered: that was just the difference it made. But Geraldine and Kate were not to blame for this, nor the two men, nor Nellie Burke herself; it was the way things *were*, no more—no less.

Her room was in the turret that looked out upon the river: for the tower-room, Duneera's gem, had always been the first-born daughter's appanage. It was a pattern maiden's bower—high-set, deep-windowed; a sense of this had doubt-

THE TURRET ROOM

less been the cause of its original conferring on "Miss Burke"; but Nellie used to feel, in bitter moods, that *her* tenure rested more securely on the steep dark stairs that led to it, and its own smallness. . . . She was proud of her room, but not of herself in it; Kate or Gerry would have filled it better, since to a daughter of the house it must belong. The sons had big, uncomfortable, but conveniently placed quarters on the ground-floor at the back; Sir William and his Lady were, of course, in the best rooms on the first floor. These had no view at all, but had space and accessibility. The younger girls, at the back of the first floor, did envy Nellie her high room, but then, as they agreed, they could not possibly have found another *thing* for which to envy her, so it was only fair. "Poor little Nellie" on good days; "horrid little wretch" on bad ones, summed the attitude of Geraldine and Kate towards her. They intended neither cruelly; the "horrid" meant no more than a sort of physical distaste, when anyone's temper was on edge, for Nellie's plainness. The soldiers and sailors, who were the givers, at Inishlee, of nicknames, called Miss Burke "the Snipe." Geraldine and Kate had found this out, and though it angered them, they could not be blind to its aptness for Nellie's sharp long nose and insignificant pale head. Her general effect of sickliness was not expressed in it, but no nickname could have brought together all the disabilities of Nellie; so they had agreed that Snipe, although a shame, was awfully good.

Nellie did not know her nickname, but she knew the rest. On some days it was her nose that she most minded; on other days, her hair—perhaps oftenest her hair, for the younger girls had great possessions in that way. Kate might grumble because hers was red, but look at the lots she had, poor Nellie used to think, as unavailingly she "French-combed" her own limp, thin locks, and reflected that, with Kate's endowment, her own nose would not have seemed to stick out quite so far. *Her* hair was of the sort about which

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

nobody could chaff her, as men did chaff Kate about the splendid tangle that made every hat, no matter how enormous, look as if it were erected on a hidden little spike. One of the sailors had fondly conveyed this fantasy to Kate herself by asking her, on a day, to lend him the pencil that her hat was always sitting on.

"What are you talking about?" said Kate, but Geraldine had instantly perceived. "Kate's hats do look like that," she cried; and then they all—the four, since there was ever a man each—rushed to the glass with Kate to see it dawn on her.

"I don't know what you mean," Kate said (she was distinctly slow); "I only know I can't keep this one on. Hullo! my hair's coming down."

"Take 'em both off," her man exclaimed, seizing the occasion of his life (as he afterwards declared) for getting in a good thing; but Kate only drawled without a smile, "How funny!" and took off the hat, while he clutched at the crinkly locks and brought them really down.

"They *are* her own!" he cried, and pulled one to full length.

"Well, mightn't you have known it?" Kate said bitterly. "Who'd have false *red* hair?"

"I like your old carrots," said her sailor and kissed the lock, making a wry face, as he finished, that he didn't mean at all—it was only for the others. He did like her old carrots; he very nearly was in love with Kate herself. Not quite; one didn't want to fall in love just yet; and besides, there was Sir Bill. . . .

For Nellie there were not these moments; nor had she the more comic fame of Geraldine's gold hair—luxuriant as Kate's, but with a queer effect of being all ends. The ends were everywhere, and the beginnings nowhere. Men used affectionately to bet about her: would she be tidy to-day? She never was, and Odds-and-Ends became Geraldine's

THE TURRET ROOM

nickname. Kate hadn't any; Carrots was too obvious even for the garrison.

So Nellie was glad she had come home late, not only because she was dusty and shabby, but because whatever she had been, no one would have wanted her. No man ever had. She literally did not know how, if a man ever had, she might have felt about such an expedition. Would she have wished to go alone with "him," or been content, as were the others, to knock about all day in the one boat, chaffing and laughing and singing, and landing only to "rag" more actually with sticks and stones while they made tea? Nellie thought, uncertainly, that she might have wished for different things from these—for long, grave tête-à-têtes with sudden silences and looks, and landings that would bring about a climax to the looks and silences. They would wander in Duneera's woods, it might be hand-in-hand, find wild-flowers and bird's-nests and little singing streams, and look into each other's eyes afresh with each discovery. . . . Sometimes, in her turret, Nellie would sit dreaming thus; not often, for she was ashamed—ashamed to know that when she should stand up, the glass would show her the sharp nose, the thin pale hair . . . ashamed of that, and of some other things besides that were less utterly her own, but *were* her own, as well as Geraldine's and Kate's, and the boys', and mother's.

Nellie would sit shuddering, not dreaming, on "bad" days, or else dreaming of what life might have been like if, though she still were plain, Sir Bill were not the famous drunkard of the place. Sometimes she used to think that she could then have borne to be the plain Miss Burke; sometimes she seemed to know that it would not have made much difference—for if anyone had loved her, even as things were, she could perhaps have felt about Sir Bill what all the others felt. That seemed to have become little. Even Lady Burke now took it almost as a matter of course; she had

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

formed it into a kind of routine. Everyone in or about the Castle knew exactly what to do when Sir Bill was brought home on somebody's car, having been found dead-drunk in a ditch, on market-days. On those days Dempsey would keep near the house, so as to be there to take him down and help him to his room; then Lady Burke would be informed.

"Who was it brought Sir William, Dempsey?" she would ask, obeying the melancholy curiosity which, even in her, had superseded grief—but still with dignity, for she was dignified, though she was red-faced, ugly, short, with sad blue staring little eyes. "Who was it found Sir William this time?" She would ask it quite spontaneously; "this time" held no bitterness of emphasis; it was just complete acceptance.

"Andy Finnegan, my lady," Dempsey might reply, and then the order would go forth that Andy was to put up his horse and have his tea in the kitchen. Or it might be "Mr. Stuart, my lady"; that would mean the police-officer—the "D.I."—who would have been coming home from Petty Sessions and have found Sir Bill, and done his deed of charity, and fled. Mr. Stuart would come out, perhaps next day, to tennis at Duneera, and no one would feel shy; it was doubtful, indeed, that anyone would remember—it happened so often. At first Lady Burke had tried, by stoppage of supplies, to cure Sir Bill. She had long controlled the money (what there was of it): at Inishlee it was common talk that Sir Bill never had more than twopence in his pocket on market days. But what good was that, people used to say compassionately, when every publican in the place would give him credit? and besides there were the endless treatings. . . . It was *no* good, as Lady Burke had realised; then the routine had been set going, and now there was nothing more to be said or done.

Nellie was apparently the only one who "minded." Duneera that she might have loved seemed so debased by

THE TURRET ROOM

these things, and the worse things which as often happened, that she had grown to hate it. When Sir Bill came home on his own car, for instance, it was worse; for then he would either be alone and in a rage, or would bring with him some comrade or some comrades of the public-houses, "merry" as himself, and they would go into the dining-room, there to sit and drink, until the servants had to make up beds for "the dear knows who" in the spare rooms, while Sir Bill was helped to *his* by Dempsey, expert in this if in no other of his duties. To hear the clumping, staggering feet, and the more obscene testimonies to Duneera's hospitality, or the curses that betokened solitary coming-home . . . such alternatives explained Andy Finnegan and Mr. Stuart as the mitigation they could be for everyone but Nellie, who, once she reached her turret, was immune. *She* could better bear those ills; for they, when she did hear them, spoke of life as something so appalling that it must one day be different, while the routine, in its comparative seemliness, could and would go on for ever.

"For ever." She was young enough to have that word in her vocabulary. Nellie was twenty-six; Geraldine and Kate were twenty-two and twenty. But Geraldine and Kate would get away—would marry. Not any of these men: the gay, the transient soldiers, or the still more gay and transient sailors—or at any rate, not probably; but there would *be* a man, some day, for Geraldine and Kate. For Nellie, no. People said they liked her best, but that meant little. It meant merely that some women and the older men felt sorer for her, and would take her part, when there was any call to take her part, against her sisters' more light-hearted way of life. But they were seldom so inspired; there was nothing to condemn in either Geraldine or Kate, who were, really, universal favourites. Nellie, in her melancholy and her sickliness and her effacement, was not quite that. Her rare champions knew no more of her than did the rest—

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

the younger soldiers and sailors and their infrequent wives, or those girls with whom her sisters most consorted. But even Geraldine and Kate had few intimates among women. The routine made women shy: "it was so awful to be there when Sir Bill came home." That *had* happened once or twice, and it was difficult for the female order to know what to say or do. Men found the situation easier, because there were the girls and Lady Burke to look after. . . . So Duneera was becoming a man's house, and no one except Nellie seemed to "mind" that, either.

Nellie sometimes thought she minded everything, sometimes knew she didn't. Little sudden shocks came on her, like that caused by the man who dropped a coin one day, and went down on his knees to look for it. They were in the drawing-room—the drawing-room with its great view—and it was tea-time. Nellie was there, on that occasion.

They all bent down; the coin was not to be discerned—it must have rolled. One of the men raised the frill of a sofa-cover, and laughed loudly, crying out, "I say! Look here." Nellie was nearest, so she looked. Under the sofa was a great pile of "sloven's fur," and Lady Burke's long-missing thimble, and cakes rejected, days and days or weeks and weeks ago, by the dogs, and a chicken's head that one of them had brought in, and . . . something unspeakable which betrayed Duneera's equal love for cats. Nellie didn't laugh, but Geraldine and Kate (after an instant) and the men did.

"I say! You'll have to give Nora what-for. . . . The sovereign may be there. Who's going to feel for it?"

The men's eyes met; amusement and disgust and pity stood in them. Nellie looked at Geraldine and Kate. Though both were laughing still, she saw that both were angry and ashamed. But what could anybody say or do? To be cross with the men would only make it worse.

Nellie spoke at last. "The room shall be thoroughly

THE TURRET ROOM

turned out to-morrow, Mr. Summers. If the sovereign's there, you'll hear from some of us at once." Her voice was gentle, but her pale cheek burned.

The young man who was responsible felt penitent. "Oh, no; I couldn't think of giving all that trouble." But as he spoke, he grew aware that he was blundering. "I mean, don't hurry about it; any time will do." He hadn't improved it much! His comrades bit their lips, to hide the smiles.

That was one thing. It belonged, in some mysterious way, to all the rest, thought Nellie—the rest that didn't specially concern herself. But then, reflecting further, Nellie felt that this might specially concern herself. She was the plain Burke, the "quiet" one—why didn't *she* look after things like this? She might do that much! But there was difficulty about servants at Duneera; it was "lonely," the maids found; they couldn't easily get into town, and all the men about the place were married. This was bad; and then there was the endless trouble caused by Sir Bill's habits—the sudden hospitalities to people whom the servants bitterly resented as creatures to be waited on, the everlasting calls for whiskey, which often must be answered by wild rushes to the nearest public-house—of course there was a near one. Indulgence, slackness, the blind eye, were more imperative at Duneera even than elsewhere; when the Burkes got hold of a girl who was in any way capable—and Nora could do some things—much art was exercised to keep her. Should Nellie interfere with her, attempt to scold her, for example (in the timid fashion that was Nellie's), about an exposure like to-day's, there would be instant "notice," and the weary search to do again. Though Nellie would do that, as she did always, she knew that it would mean but scant improvement, and the long troubled period, first, of getting the new housemaid "used" to Sir Bill's ways.

The sofa episode hurt Nellie mortally. There were some

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

things she didn't notice then, and one of them was dirt. She had lived on, placidly, in squalor such as that; she had even been rather proud of the drawing-room. Perhaps the visitors had always noticed; it might be another of the jokes about Duneera. Mr. Summers hadn't seemed to be surprised; it was more as if he had thought they knew and didn't care. Or perhaps he meant it for a friendly hint? People might have found the atmosphere so awful that a "pal" had seized occasion to say something. Did the drawing-room *smell*, and hadn't the Burkes noticed that, either?

Nellie cried that day when she escaped to her own room. The liquid pale-brown eyes, when she had finished crying, looked out upon the river desolately, and saw the others, drifting, laughing, just as usual. . . . The room was thoroughly turned out next day, and Mr. Summers' gold coin was found under the very sofa. Kate wrote him a note to say so; he came and got the sovereign. Did they laugh together over its retrieval, Nellie wondered. Kate had said, on the evening of the dreadful day, that he'd been horrid, but the only thing to do was not to seem to mind. Geraldine agreed—so did Nellie, for that matter. But Nellie had tacked on a comment.

"How *can* you like him, Kate?"

"I don't care a ha'porth about him," Kate said lightly, in her pretty brogue.

"Then why do you ask him out so often?"

"Oh, don't bother, Nellie. We've been over that ground often enough, haven't we?"

They had. It was the eternal question of "What else is there to do?"; and Nellie felt that she was a poor champion of her side of it. Nobody could want to live like her, neglected by the Mr. Summerses and Winters, lonely every way, as idle as the rest, and never getting any fun at all. If she had been clever, if she had even been religious. . . .

They all went into Inishlee for church on Sundays—the

THE TURRET ROOM

Protestant church, for this branch of the Burkes had somehow become Protestant. Their pew was in a splendid place, the front one in the northern transept; it commanded the military pew opposite, where the officers of the church-party from the Barracks sat. Whether that pew was full or half empty depended on the regiment which happened to be garrisoning Inishlee at any given time. Should it be, territorially speaking, an "English" one, the pew was full, for then a greater number of the men would be of the "Protestant" faith, and so there were, naturally, more officers required to bring them to church. An Irish or Scottish regiment meant a half-empty pew. Just now it was an English one, and the party was so large that the band came with it—there was almost a formal church parade. The band was good, as such bands go; Inishlee thought it magnificent; scarlet coats and glittering helmets blazed in the grey square before the old and lovely church (once the Catholic Cathedral); on fine days, all girls wore best frocks and hats, and those were better ones than usual when the regiment at Inishlee was English. When service was over, you met the officers coming out. The church party would be forming up, and your man was perhaps for a while unconcerned in that manœuvre. It was nice to be saluted, instead of having a mere hat taken off to you; your man turned into a higher order of being, yet was still your man, and all the more so for the vanity of his calling, which—no girl could help noticing—still survived in even the most senior when he met her and conversed with her, in uniform. The self-consciousness—girls called it conceit—thus induced in him enhanced her own; she almost trembled, she quite blushed; it was the best of all the meetings, though so short, for soon his duty would remove him, and the band blared out, and "They" marched off resplendent, leaving happy hearts behind, and eyes that sparkled brighter even than on other days, lit by

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

the tumult of the beating quick-step, with its insolence that was so gay, its heartlessness that was so manly.

Yes: they went to church on Sundays. Even Nellie sometimes had a gorgeous man to talk to, for the Burkes, despite Sir Bill, were personages, and looked-out-for. When there wasn't a big party and the band, there were still the scantier units—there was sure to be some fun; but on those more concentrated days, Miss Burke returned to her background, and saw church with an undazzled eye. On such days, she saw that church was not *religion*. What was religion? Nellie did not know, and could not have found out. Nobody she knew was religious—for she knew not many Catholics, and those she did know never talked about their faith. The outward gestures of the faith were familiar to her: the servants went to confession (and a great nuisance it was to arrange for); there were Lady-days and Saints' Days, and the Friday fast—another nuisance, for fish was hard to get, out at Duneera. In the season boys came round with salmon-peel—poached of course from the famed river, Inishlee's great "sight," that shows to gasping visitors the sensational silver clumps ("Good God! and those are *salmon!*") lying thickly under and beyond a bridge in the very middle of the town. . . . But you couldn't afford salmon, even at poached prices, for the kitchen dinner; and the servants would complain, at regular intervals, of the eternal salted ling.

The parish priest dined at Duneera sometimes, but even the remarkable Father Lally, of Inishlee itself, lost value when he came to the Castle. What he was remarkable for was precisely his temperance work. That was difficult to talk of, with Sir Bill at the head of a table. . . . Their own clergyman took people like themselves for granted, though he too was famous for his zeal, and was besides a noted preacher—you could really listen to his sermons. Nellie did; but they, like everybody's sermons, began at a point of fervour which she had never reached.

THE TURRET ROOM

She did no good works. Few girls do, in Ireland, and (as in most lands) never they who do the more amusing things. Though Nellie didn't do those very much, she belonged, by all the circumstances of her life, to that division, and her delicacy, with its consequent inertia, made another reason. There was nothing, in short, that she could turn to; Nellie just existed, vaguely.

2

The turret-room, remote and high, cut off from the house proper by its little door, could sometimes seem a refuge, but could sometimes frighten her. The little door was frightening, for it stuck, and had to be much pulled and shaken from her side, before she could get out. . . . One night last winter, when the elders were away and the boys dining at the Barracks, Nellie had come into the drawing-room crying. Geraldine and Kate were startled, but they soothed her tears, and she said apologetically, when she could stop sobbing: "I was only thinking—suppose there was a fire some night! That awful door. . . ."

They laughed. "The devil looks after his own."

"I'm not his own," said Nellie, brokenly.

"I meant the house," said Geraldine, in a rare tone of bitterness.

"Do you—*mind* too then, Gerry?"

"What's the good of minding? A short life and a merry one."

"Is it merry?" Nellie quavered.

Kate frowned on her. "The Burkes were never grouzers, anyhow, so don't let *us* begin."

"Grousing's no worse than disgracing the house we live in, and that's what these Burkes do—'the oldest baronet in Ireland's family!' I wish Duneera would fall down," said Nellie in her dim voice, slowly, with no vehemence at all.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Her brogue was marked as she spoke thus: this is the way with Irish gentry, when moved deeply.

"It won't, then, so keep your horrid wishes to yourself. Can't you be proud of the old place, instead of abusing it?"

"It's us I'm abusing," Nellie said. "But indeed I'm not proud of Duneera; I hate the sight of it, going to rack and ruin the way it is, and ourselves with it. I'd be thankful if it fell down and was buried in the ground, every stone of it, and then perhaps we might lead decent lives, out of this." She spoke in the same monotone, coloured only by the Irish inflections.

"It's like a curse on the place," murmured Kate; but Geraldine as usual, was quicker to understand.

"She's only frightened. Why don't you change into one of the downstairs rooms, Nellie?"

"I will, I think. But there'd be such a fuss; they'd imagine the world was coming to an end. It's only in the winter I mind it, with that awful door, and the wind howling down the stairs behind me and putting out the candle, the way it did to-night."

Gerry shivered. "I don't know how you stand it."

But the plan of changing to another room got put off and put off, in native fashion; the weeks and months went by, and Nellie slept behind the little door, and the door stuck. . . . Now it was the summer; terrors fade on summer nights. Nellie, on this afternoon of late home-coming, rejoiced to think she hadn't changed her room—the view had never looked more lovely, never solaced her so much. There was something in the sunlit river, flowing by that promised tranquillity; nothing that she could define, but the dim soul in her was drawn on to some vaguely figured end that should be like the river's—what she wanted or what she must yield to? Nellie did not know; enough that it would come—the quiet, perhaps the glad, attainment—no less for her than for the river.

THE TURRET ROOM

Sitting in the window, dreaming so, she saw her sisters and their men come in, and only then perceived that the bright day had clouded over. A rough wind had blown up from the sea; "all the way from America," as people say of the west wind at Inishlee. Nellie stayed in her own room till dinner-time; not till then were the guests gone. Dinner rarely waited for Sir Bill; it would not wait to-night, for this was a great day in Inishlee. The land Leaguers of an outlying district had been turbulent; several were "up" at Petty Sessions there, and Sir Bill, as a J.P. of the County, had driven over to take his place on the bench. Inishlee was foaming with excitement—Nellie had seen something of it during her shopping—about the Leaguers and the presence in their district (later to be looked for in the county-town itself) of one of the most impassioned Nationalist Members. It was rumoured that he was to be arrested, that night in Inishlee; there was sure to be disturbance if he were. . . . On such occasions the uncertain "state of the country" faded, before the certain state of Sir Bill, who was a rabid Unionist. When to all the rest of the reasons for getting into that state was added this, of having to drink destruction to the foes of Imperial Unity . . . it was worse than market-day; if he did come home accompanied, the party would be "farther gone," and would go on still farther, than on ordinary nights; there was no hope at all of the routine.

The boys were absent too, in case there should be any fun, so the Duneera ladies dined alone. None of them was interested in the wider issue; Unionist women of their class, in all parts of Ireland but Ulster, show a detachment from the Question which, originating in native irony, is fed, in cases like the Burkes', by a near view of Unionism as represented by the Sir Bills and their adherents. . . . So dinner was depressing, and the hour afterwards was worse. Rain had ceased, but the great wind was getting up and up; the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

girls could not go out, and the long summer-twilight made things inexpressibly forlorn. They sat in the drawing-room a while, restlessly, then they prepared for bed. No one would wait up for the men; it was impossible to guess when any of them might arrive.

"Even the boys will be squiffy to-night," said Geraldine, who cultivated slang.

"Oh, Gerry, not the boys—they never are," cried Nellie.

"That's all *you* know about it, away up there in your turret!"

"Thank goodness I am, then," she retorted, but the boast died in her heart as she went up, her candle flickering in the gusts that whirled through at the eyelet windows. The dark stairs rustled as the dust and leaves on them were stirred; drear echoes whimpered in the background—Nellie was unstrung and nervous by the time she reached her room. She stood a moment, covering her face; then went to the window to look out upon the grey lift of the river, flowing strong and fast. Again it calmed her; she undressed, and read a while in bed to reassure herself still further—Edna Lyall; Nellie loved her. Then she put out her light and fell asleep, despite the storm.

It seemed a long time afterwards that she was standing in the dark, without a candle, at the little door, and it was stuck, and she was pulling it and calling. She strove to wake, and woke, and it was not a dream. In the house there were strange noises, and the wind was higher than before. The noises grew in number and in violence; footsteps would sound near one moment, and she called more hopefully, but they had not been near, and they were gone, and the voices that had cried were fading. In the darkness she tugged on at the stiff door; it did not loosen, and through it there came drifting in the smoke that made her cough, and little flames were creeping under it—the only things that she could see. She saw them, and she felt the smoke possess

THE TURRET ROOM

her throat; as in a nightmare pang her breath went from her and now another pain began in one foot, where the flames were creeping in—she caught the long white night-dress up and clutched it round her, tugging at the door again with that restricted reach. Beyond it, on the other side, was a dull gathering roar that sounded like the kitchen boiler when it got too hot; and Nellie listened and she shrieked “I’m here, Mamma, Mamma—Kate, Geraldine—Mamma, I’m here”—and listened, and ran back again and sobbed between her screams, for now there was no sound at all but the dull roar and the wind rushing down the stairs behind her through the eyelet windows. The door was driven back each time it seemed to loosen; the wind found out the little flames; they shot up into the smoke, but the door gave at last, and through it walked a sheet of fire, tall, strong, and splendid, and it met the strong wild wind, and both embraced her as a man might have embraced, and into those two arms she sank, and called and sobbed no more. They held her close until she lay within them, not as she had been when she was born—no, not like that; like nothing that you could have known for her, nor for a woman’s body, nor for anything at all.

Upon the lit, blown lawn the others huddled shivering in their night attire. . . . It seemed not so very strange. . . . Sir Bill, a powerful big man, was not undressed, nor were his “friends,” who this time numbered four. They were all sober now, though they had been more drunk than ever when the first shriek sounded, and the household seemed to tumble helter-skelter into the dark hall that was no longer dark, but bright with a wide throbbing glimmer that grew wider every instant. Sir Bill’s party was sitting in the dining-room without a light, for not a candle had been left for him—there was nothing but a fixed lamp on the first floor landing, and the oil in that was sinking low. Sir Bill had been beside himself with rage: “It had been done on purpose to

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

disgrace him before his friends," and he had stamped down into the kitchen, dropping matches on his way, to find the necessary glasses, and prove to the bemused quartette that he was master in his own house.

Now, through the half-open door, they saw the women in the hall. Sir Bill got up and staggered out; he stood there in the pulsing light, not asking what it was, but swearing at the women for their "row" and the forgotten candles. He stopped and stared, in a few seconds—his throat was full of something, and he looked around more angrily than ever, as if to ask what this new trick might be. A glittering tongue of flame leaped forth to answer; he seemed to sober on the instant . . . the whole night-gowned company of women was running to the door before the shepherding five men . . . and then they were all out upon the lawn, and Duneera streaming like a banner into the dim sky of coming day.

A woman's voice shrilled suddenly above the roar of storm and fire.

"Great God Almighty, where's Miss Nellie?"—and Dempsey, the same instant, ran up from the river-path. His cries were tossed upon the wind as he came onward.

"Miss Nellie's in the turret, and it roaring like the sea with flames and burning! Holy Mother of God, I heard her voice, and she calling in the turret—aye, hearken, my lady, it's for you and the young ladies she's calling, but sure nobody could go into the place. My God, what will we do; she's well-nigh consumed by now, and she's crying and calling the whole time, so it'd lacerate your soul to hear her——"

"Ah, go to hell with your soul and your talk out of that," Sir Bill screamed savagely, and ran to the turret-path, while all around broke forth a wailing from the women-servants, and Lady Burke fell on her knees and beat her hands upon the grass, her grey hair blowing feebly in the wind. Geraldine and Kate stood, clasping one another, for a second,

THE TURRET ROOM

then together fled towards Nellie's path, but Sir Bill ran back and Dempsey followed them; they were seized and held, and while they struggled and cried out that "somebody must save her," Dempsey holding Geraldine with hands that never loosened, said in a quick quiet voice, most strange to hear from him who had so babbled but a moment since, "Ah, look at that, miss," and they looked, to see the turret flare from every eyelet, quiver, break in two, the lower part collapsing on itself, while the crest fell with a loud clatter of wide-leaping stones upon the path and lawn.

An hour afterwards they still stood in a haggard group beside the place where it had been. The fire brigade had come at last, but Duneera too was fallen in a heap of flickering stones; and there was nothing for the men to do but play their hose upon the smaller mound, that so, in time, they might find Nellie there. With every minute that the household watched, the terror of that small mound's secret seemed to deepen. . . . Dempsey, standing at the back with other servants, suddenly caught Nora's arm. She had tossed up her head in a strange gesture, like a baying dog's.

"Keep quiet, girl!"

She turned on him; her eyes were shining with a wild clear light. He gripped her arm more urgently.

"For all sakes, keep quiet. They think to find her corpse, and she in that place till it melted! But how could they be thinking of it the way we can, and she their own that they forgot, God help them?"

"If they find annything itself," another man said, dully, "what one of them would be able to say it was Miss Nellie and not the rest of the rubbish? I've heard tell how bones can be consumed to ashes."

At this, the girl threw up her head again, but Dempsey covered her mouth quickly with his other hand.

"For the love of God, keep quiet. . . . Never fear but you'll get your chance——"

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Aye, wait so," the other man joined in. "Sure when was there a funeral went out of the Castle but your family was at it, since th' ould days when the Burkes were Catholics? Faith, they never forgot them days, for all they turned."

"And what funeral would go out this time?" the girl, freeing her lips with a wild movement, interrupted. "That'll be a quare funeral without a corpse—the quarest my family ever went to, I'm thinking, and they the greatest in all Con-naught for the keening-women. Is it an empty coffin ye'd have them keen, Peter Dempsey and John Meehan, that ye have that talk out of ye?"

The men turned pale. "Begob, she's right," said Dempsey in an awestruck whisper. "I hadn't the sense to make it out like that."

"'Tis truth; she's in the right," Meehan agreed. "And Miss Nellie the first young girl ever died at Duncera, for all the rest was married women."

"What will they do at all, the creatures, when it comes on them the way it did on you and me?" But Dempsey, in his recognition of her "sense," had forgotten Nora's dread inheritance. She raised her head again in the strange dog-like gesture; he caught her arm again: "Keep quiet!" but the girl, now shaken to the soul, was past restraint—she uttered the unearthly cry; it pierced the shuddering dawn, and Sir Bill turned, with a quick face of terror, then dropped upon the ground beside the heap of stones, and cursed her kneeling.

"Stop that howling bitch, you fools—clap your hands on her mouth and smother her. Damn her and all the Clancys and their screeching women! Can't you wait for the funeral, you——"

"What funeral?" she moaned, as if the words were in the eldritch chant; then, breaking off her cry: "'Tis now ye'll have Miss Nellie keened or never, or will ye bury the whole place with her that ye may get her bones blest that way? No other way will contrive it, if ye were looking till the

THE TURRET ROOM

Judgment Day—and may the Holy Powers forgive you in that day, Sir William Burke of Duneera, to be miscalling me and my family that has the knowledge of the keening, and it come down to them since ever there was a Burke at the Castle—aye, and before it, and you cursing them on your knees beside the place that'll be Miss Nellie's only grave——”

But the other servants, spellbound until now, were on her, and though once more the keen swelled, rising, falling, on the sunless dawn, she suffered them to lead her down the drive to the gate-lodge; and all along the road to Inishlee the people woke to hear the death-cry from Duneera, and rush, terror-struck, to learn from those who now came towards them from the Castle, “what was it happened to the Burkes.”

3

The Clancy women, in their ceremonial hooded cloaks, were waiting on a misty morning, two days later at the Castle gates. Nora was among them, hooded too; she was to “have her chance,” for Dempsey had been right—Sir Bill had revered old custom. The Clancy tradition dated with the Burkes' first records; he had sent the awaited summons to the famous keening-women.

They stood, faceless in the falling hoods, and murmured to each other.

“’Tis madness, but what else would ye expect?”

“Sure how did anyone ever get such a notion?”

“’Twas Nora put it in his head.”

“’Twas so. That very night I said it, and himself cursing me the whole time.”

“And the Protestant clergyman to let him—but that’s the way with Protestants, they can do what they like.”

“Ah, Sir William Burke’s a big man amongst the quality, for all he’s half disgraced. ’Twas that did it, and not the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

religion at all. What one of them at the Castle ever had the name of religion? Miss Nellie herself, and she a quiet little thing, was never that way, and not one of the rest would anyone be considering. Her Ladyship lost heart; she was no more than the shadow of a woman, this long time."

"My brother passed that remark this morning. 'How particular he is about the burying,' says he; 'him that never cast a thought on them things all his life till now!'"

"'Consecrated ground' is the name they have for it, and would ye ever think to see such a thing as that, to be burying the whole place in the Protestant graveyard with Miss Nellie, for fear they wouldn't know which was her and which was the Castle?"

"Arrah, what else would they do?" cried Nora. "Would ye have them cart away her dust and ashes with the rubbish? 'Tis only the little turret, moreover, will be buried—so let ye keep quiet, and not have so much talk between yourselves. He's a fine solemn man, when he's sober; only for the red face of him and a taint of whiskey on the breath, no one'd think since Miss Nellie was burnt that he ever raised his elbow at all. . . . Whisht! They're coming. Now let ye be quiet and myself'll raise the keen, for that's my certain due that lived in the same house with her."

The hooded women drew together, like a chorus, as from the house there came the funeral group. A vast coffin swayed upon the bearers' shoulders; its gathered contents, firmly packed by scandalised experts, seemed to the Duneera men a burden incommensurate with human fortitude. They had been carefully rehearsed by the undertakers, but now that they were carrying, no more a simulacrum, but the very thing itself, each face was rigid, haunted—they were "mutes" indeed. As they moved onward, now and then they thought to hear a grinding of the stones against each other—the stones among which crept the dust that was and was not Nellie. . . . At any moment panic might have seized them;

THE TURRET ROOM

but they came on with their set faces where the eyes alone had life, and that the life of terror as they glanced, at intervals, beneath the bristling box to one another.

Sir Bill, pale, solemn, under the grotesque stigmata of his normal life, came close behind with Lady Burke. She was indeed but "the shadow of a woman" in her black envelopment, faceless as the hooded chorus, and with no such outlet for the awe that wrapped her like her clinging veil. The boys were next—two fair-haired, puzzled creatures, vexed by the eccentric, sullen in a sense of make-believe. Geraldine and Kate went hand-in-hand; their faces, just discernible in less obliterating masks than Lady Burke's, were like the coffin-bearers', tranced with terror. Each held more tightly to the other's hand, as every step drew on to that with which the women's wailing would break out—the keen that they had heard of all their lives, but never heard in its full ceremonial meaning until now. Their souls were shuddering from that, as they had shuddered from the rest of the dread burying that ground the little dust beneath its ghastliness.

"And she that hated the whole place!"

"She wished it would fall down and bury itself. . . ."

So, with shaken hearts, the sisters, when they heard of it, had whispered to each other. The irony for which they had no name confounded them; they felt they knew not what. But they came meekly on behind the symbol of her final impotence—it reached the gate, and now, with such a sound as mocks imagination, Nora's solitary cry received it. The coffin quivered on the bearers' shoulders—they stopped short, but with a muttered invocation ("Holy Virgin, guard her soul!") they braced themselves again. The hooded women turned to walk beside; each joined in while she turned, and the blank sky might seem to curdle as the waves of human woe poured into it.

THE PICTURES

By JANE FINDLATER

THE shores of Olnig on a summer night were like the shores of Heaven as weary mortals think of these: the long white beaches were just kissed by the scarcely moving tide, and on the horizon floated dim purple outlines that might have been the Isles of the Blessed.

There was no stirring of the atmosphere on such a windless night as this, but sometimes a great freshness would breathe in gently from the ocean and as suddenly die away—it carried with it the scent of leagues of sea. Then the sun would go down in a spectacular manner, lighting up the sky to a blazing scarlet behind the purple islands, . . . it was all unbelievably exquisite. Yet “wee Katie” (so she was always called) when released from her toil in the byre would stand and gaze out at this wonder of beauty without a single exclamation of surprise or pleasure.

Katie was one of the humblest creatures God ever made; she seemed scarcely to have a life of her own at all, just to have appeared on this planet to work for other people, toiling on, day after day, at her obscure tasks, without joy and almost without remuneration. She was thirteen on the day that she first arrived at the farm, fresh from the tender mercies of an unloved aunt who had brought her up somehow on a pittance wrung from a very reluctant father. Such pittances are always joyfully discontinued at the earliest opportunity permitted by the law, so when Katie became a financial burden she had to go out to work at once. Her figure was stumpy and ill-proportioned, and she had a lamentable habit of never managing to hook her frock rightly, which did not add to her charms. Though Katie’s hair was

THE PICTURES

supposed to be "up," it was much more often half "down" her back in a tumbled, untidy plait, and wisps of it fell across her eyes and had to be brushed or tossed back when she looked up to speak to anyone: a doleful figure wee Katie, as ever stepped. Her day was no sinecure: cows are milked three times a day on well-regulated farms, and Katie had the milking of five to attend to. Between times, there were pails to wash, and churns to scald, and shelves to scrub, and basins to cleanse—an endless, fatiguing, unchanging round of work. And here was all the child's diversion when the long day was done—to wander down to the white shore, and look out to sea: a poor amusement Katie found it. What to her were the long white beaches, the lipping waves, or even the scarlet banners of sunset? The heart of man is unsearchable, and one never gets to the end of the surprises that are to be found in character; to look at Katie one would have thought her almost too dull to have any aspirations or longings—but this was far from being the case; in her heart there burned a wild thirst for amusement. How this had been stifled all the long, long winter months at Olnig, Heaven alone could tell! If little Johnnie Ross, the farmer's son, extracted a few screeching notes from his concertina, Katie would execute a clumsy caper on the stone floor of the dairy, and down her hair would tumble about her ears, and Mrs. Ross would reprove her sharply, telling her to "mind her work and niver heed Johnnie and the concertina." Then sometimes Ran Reid, the lately demobilised tinker, would appear with his pipes at the door of the farm. And at the first sound of the thin, gay, skirling notes, Katie flung down whatever she was doing and rushed to the door to listen.

Ran was quite a personage in the countryside since his return from Mesopotamia: he still, by virtue of his late adventures, wore a ragged khaki coat, and it was only the outward sight of the profound inward awakening that the man had gone through.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Ran had seen the world, and though he preferred, like the sow that was washed, to return to wallowing in the mire, he wallowed, so to speak, with his eyes open. As he stalked alongside of his donkey-cart, his pipes under his arm, Ran had quite the air of a man of the world. Ross, the farmer, often came to the door to speak to him on a winter afternoon when there was little doing out of doors, and Katie would always manage to edge herself behind the door to listen, for his sanguinary tales of Mesopotamia delighted her fancy, and she pondered them as she went about her work in the byre.

Olnig in winter was indeed no foretaste of Heaven. Katie was often so buffeted by the gale that she almost failed to make her way between the house and the byre. Wrapped in an old oilskin coat, her hands blue with cold, she had to face the flying sleet that drove in pitilessly from the Atlantic. There were no purple islands and lispig waves then, only a hoarse, roaring waste of billows, desolate and terrible beyond description. Katie's one preoccupation was to get under cover as quickly as might be; but she had always a moment of acute struggle with the bolt of the byre door, which refused to open at once to the touch of her benumbed fingers; then, dripping, blown about, exasperated by this fight with the elements, she gained the shelter of the byre. There at least the cows were warm, and Katie would lean against their hot, rough sides with a sigh of relief as their kindly breath thawed her frozen cheek. . . .

Then the snowstorms came, smothering and white, with sometimes, to follow, an awful frost that seemed as if it would nip life at its very sources. Grand pictures were to be seen in these winter storms by anyone with seeing eyes: but Katie's eyes were holden. On nights of intense frost, the great indigo vault of the sky, strewn with myriads of stars, was a sight to awe and terrify the beholder, making him turn back, with longings for the homely earth, from

THE PICTURES

these pathless wastes of space. But no distressing thoughts of the terrors of space or the insignificance of man's place in it visited Katie's brain when she looked out of the skylight window of her freezing little attic bedroom. Her shudders, poor child, were of a much less subtle kind, as she drew the heavy homespun blankets round her, and wondered if she would ever feel warm again. But snowstorms did not last for ever, even at Olnig, and the long, despairing Highland spring began, with ceaseless rain and tireless wind, soaking and battering the farm for weeks on end, till it seemed as if summer must be only a fable that could never come true; yet there were signs of life—calves in the byre, and lambs—shivering little lambs—on the hillside, and frogs arriving in the pools of the old peat cuttings. Katie was constantly in the byre feeding the calves now, with her head tied up in a little tartan shawl, and her person wrapped in every additional garment she possessed.

She was young enough to find it rather fun, and would sometimes laugh outright at the gambols the creatures gave as they ran towards her, to guzzle up the milk from the pail. It was at this spring season that her feud with Flora Reid, the eldest of Ran Reid's six olive branches, first began. Flora was what the expressive phrase "a limb" indicates. With her mop of fiery red hair, and her slanting blue eyes she was an incarnation of lawlessness and mischief.

The most importunate beggar of all the begging tinker clan, Flora had, as it were, acquired fresh powers in her trade during the troubled years of the war. For though she, her three brothers, her sister and her mother lived in affluence they had never dreamt of before, they would have been the last to acknowledge this fact. Instead of doing so, Flora added a new, long and very effective clause to her usual begging whine:

"Will ye no' gie me a puckle tea, Mistress? for faither's awa' fechtin' the Germans, an' mither's four weans, an'

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

mysel', an' maybe faither 'll no' come hame . . . could ye no' gie's an auld coat or a bit shawl for it's gey cauld the day? . . . faither's awa' fechtin' the Germans an' mither's a' her lane an' maybe faither 'll no' come back . . . have ye ony auld castin' wad keep the baby frae the cauld the nicht? he's no verra weel, an' noo that faither's awa' fechtin' the Germans . . . etc., etc. . . ."

So her endless tale of requests had gone on during the two war winters when Ran was away; but now that her father was safely home again, Flora had to change her tune. The sympathies of the countryside had been almost drained, so she invented what she called Mesoptamy Fever to revive sympathy afresh:

"Will ye gie's a puckle tea, if *you* please, faither's back from fechtin' the Germans, an' he's bad wi' Mesoptamy fever . . . if ye'd an' auld blanket by ye, mistress, could ye no' gie it for faither? He's come back wi' Mesoptamy fever on him, ye ken, aye, it gaes an' comes awful" (this to account for Ran's appearance of rude health); "whiles he'll be near deid wi't. . . . Gie's a drop broth, if *you* please, Mistress. . . ."

Mrs. Ross was much too liberal to the tinkers, and Flora never asked in vain; but one spring evening it happened that Mrs. Ross had gone with her husband in the cart to Achinbeg, leaving Katie in sole charge of the house. Katie was very busy and *affairée*, with everything to do. She had swept out the kitchen, put fresh peats on the fire, and laid the table for tea to be ready for Mrs. Ross on her return. Then in marched Flora, just about her own age, and incredibly importunate. First, she wanted tea, of course; Katie refused; then a scone from the pile on the table; a second refusal; then a "drop milk"; refusal number three; then an old skirt—but at this Katie became impatient and told her to go away in no bated language:

THE PICTURES

"Awa' wi' ye, or I'll send Rover at ye!" she threatened, pointing to the collie on the hearth.

"I'll no' gang—the Mistress aye gies me a puckle tea."

"Gang aff, ye're a fair torment!" cried the exasperated Katie, brandishing a broom, and advancing across the kitchen at Flora. Rover jumped up with a growl to join in the fray, and at sight of his bared white teeth, Flora ran out through the open door without further delay. But from that hour, war was declared between the two children—a war in which the stupid Katie was always the loser.

One of Flora's tricks was to make her way into the dairy and torment Katie to fill her "tinny" with milk. When Katie refused to do this, the little beggar ran off to the farmhouse and wheedled Mrs. Ross into saying that she might get what she wanted; then Katie had the humiliation of having to fill the "tinny," and Flora carried it away in triumph. It was extraordinary in how many ways she managed to annoy Katie—she seemed to be endowed with an uncanny knowledge of how to do it. Mrs. Ross might leave her whole family washing on the hillside to bleach, and none of it would be touched; but if Katie left any of her poor little garments out at night, some of them would be sure to have disappeared before morning. Katie used to sit on an old log of wood near the door in her few spare moments, knitting herself a pair of black worsted stockings; if Mrs. Ross called to her from the kitchen, she would lay down her knitting on the log, and perhaps not return for ten minutes or so. Twice, however, she had returned to find her needles pulled out and half the stocking pulled down.

Katie began to think her work was bewitched, for it was impossible to see how the needles could have come out by themselves. Mrs. Ross said it must have been the kitten: Katie did not believe her. . . . One day all the milk pans had been scoured and put out in the sun to dry. An hour afterwards they were found face downwards in the mud,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

and had all to be scoured over again. . . . Another day the dairy floor, newly scrubbed out, was covered with filth—the hens had been driven in from the yard across it, while Katie was having her dinner. . . . Yet this guerilla warfare was carried out with such cleverness that it would have been impossible to lay the blame on Flora—no one had seen her anywhere near the farm; but Katie knew that her little enemy was the cause of every trouble.

Remote as Olnig Farm was, some modern ideas had penetrated to it; so Katie suddenly demanded an “afternoon out,” with as great determination as any town young woman; she had read about “afternoons out” in the *Weekly Scotsman*, and decided to have one. Her demand was granted, and then the question was, What to do with these long vacant afternoons?

It was all very well for Katie to put on her Sunday gown, and even to cram her empurpled hands into a pair of cotton gloves; but when this was done, the poor child had nothing more amusing to do than to walk in solitary (albeit gloved) splendour, along the wind-swept moor road to Achinbeg. If she persisted in her determination to reach the village, the four long miles had to be walked all over again on the way home. And the village—what did it afford in the way of amusement? There was little to see there. The hotel, closed for nine months of the year; the Post Office, presided over by old Mrs. McIvor; the shop where it was possible to buy sandy chocolate and liquorice lozenges—this was all the village had to offer as entertainment for Katie’s young mind, unless you include the station, where two or three trains came crawling in almost at a foot pace!

Still Katie persisted in her weekly pilgrimage to Achinbeg. It is difficult for those who have always lived in towns to understand the craving for variety that young people in the country feel so deeply. But the fact is, that what the human being wants to make himself or herself happy is often

THE PICTURES

the opposite of what he or she already has. The country-dweller hungers for stir and amusement; the town-dweller for quiet and repose; it is hard to say which craving is the stronger. Poor "wee Katie," trailing along the desolate hill road to Achinbeg in search of amusement, had a sick longing for variety that was pitiful to behold. Oh, for something—*anything* to happen! But week followed week, and month followed month, yet no excitement came poor Katie's way. And here she was on this beautiful midsummer evening, as dull as ever.

Her starved fancy projected itself into the week ahead, striving to see any hope of change in the monotonous round of her days. No: she could see no possible source from which help could come.

To-morrow morning she knew she would have to rise at six, as she had done every day that summer, to light the kitchen fire, and sweep the floor, and put on the big black kettle to boil. Then the cows had to be milked, and the pails and pans had to be scalded, and there was the dairy floor to scrub, and the churn to work, and then the cows to be milked again, and more pails to scald, and so on, and so on. . . .

Katie shook her head, and repeated aloud to herself in a dismal little rhyme, "*Aye, aye, there's aye the kye*"—the cows seemed to fill the whole foreground of her life, there was no getting away from them, and the milk pails, and the churn, and the butter. . . .

"I wonder, will James the herring-man be here the nicht?" she thought. James was one of the few links that connected Olnig Farm with the outer world—didn't he drive all the way from Mallaig, and sometimes had a paper on him that he would leave with Ross? Not that Katie took any interest in the larger happenings of the world; but sometimes there was a thrilling murder case reported in the paper, and she liked to read it by daylight, though after dark the memory of its thrills had an unpleasant way of coming back into her mind.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

To-night she longed for some such unpleasant excitement. "Yon one about the corp found in the cellar was awfae interestin'," she meditated. . . . Beside her at that moment the sheep were nibbling the short green sward that grew close to the shore, all embroidered with thyme; and the tide was coming in, running up the long white shore with a gentle sound like millions of kisses—and Katie sat deaf and blind to it all, longing for a rag of a newspaper that might tell her more about a corpse found in a cellar.

Then, as if in answer to her longing, Katie saw the herring-cart come in sight round the curve of the bay. Maggie, the starved old black pony that drew the cart, always quickened her slow pace as the Farm came in sight, because she was allowed to graze for a few minutes on the turf beside the door while her master sold his herrings to Mrs. Ross.

"Ech! I wonder will James hae a paper wi' him the nicht?" Katie said to herself, making all haste across the shore towards the farm.

Mrs. Ross had come out to the door with a dish, and stood waiting while James piled the herrings on to it.

"There ye are, mistress, there's the dissen for ye, bonnie fish, an' real cheap," he said, and then, turning to Katie, he added:

"Here's for ye, m' lassie—ye'll no' verra often get the chance o' the likes o' this." He took from his pocket a bright pink bill, printed in startling black type, and handed it to Katie as he spoke. Her heart almost stood still for a moment as she read the announcement:

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

EAST LYNNE: (The World's most famous novel, filmed for the first time by Ford's Cinema at Achinbeg.)

Tickets 2s., 1s., 6d., and standing room, 1d.

THE PICTURES

Katie read on, scarcely taking in the fulness of delight that it might mean to her if she could really see a Cinema at last! Often she had read of this delight, but she had never hoped to enjoy it. She looked up into Mrs. Ross's face, and there was a world of pleading in her voice as she asked humbly:

"Will I get tae gang, mistress? I'd like *awfae* tae gang."

"What about the kye, lassie?" Mrs. Ross replied; but there was a smile lurking round her mouth as she spoke. Katie fingered the pink bill and looked down, making no answer; the cows were a solid obstacle not to be lightly put aside, she knew. There were ten of them, and five of these were her charge. Mrs. Ross could never milk the whole ten. As she stood there in silence a blind fury of indignation surged up in Katie's heart. Could it be possible that the cows were going to deprive her of this wonderful treat? She was far too unsophisticated to question the justice of the universe; but this choking feeling of resentment overcame her; she had not a word to say, could not even plead her cause, could not raise her eyes from the ground in case she should read final refusal in the face of her mistress. She stood there trembling, awaiting her fate.

Mrs. Ross and the herring-man exchanged a wink of great amusement, then Mrs. Ross spoke again:

"I might maybe get auld Annie from the Croft to help wi' the kye," she said, thoughtfully. "Johnnie'll be wantin' tae get tae see it, Katie, an' he's sic a laddie for playin' himsel' on the road, ye'd need tae look after him." Katie drew a long, slow breath of delight, and looked up. Mrs. Ross and the herring-man were both laughing, and he added to her bliss by suggesting that Johnnie and she might drive the four miles to Achinbeg in the herring-cart if they chose. Here was a delightful suggestion, indeed! Katie had never driven to an entertainment in her life, and the prospect of this herring-scented drive filled her with ecstasy—she could

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

wear her new blue merino, and her white cotton gloves, even if the night was wet!

"Ye see, I'm aye on the road on Fridays," James reminded them. "An' the cairt can hold the twa o' them fine."

What would many *blasé* persons give to have wee Katie's keen appetite for enjoyment? All the week that followed was to her a blissful dream of anticipation. She looked forward to every moment of the evening's programme, from the one when she would mount the cart in her blue merino, to that of her return at night. It seemed to her that she would be a new creature then—she would have seen a Cinema at last. Though Katie appeared to be plodding in and out of the byre on her broken shoes just as usual, she really trod on air all that week. She began to count the days off one by one—six, five, four, three, two—at last she was able to say "to-morrow" would be the great day, and to-morrow would soon be here. She stood by the door that evening, and looked up into the clear amber-coloured sky. Ross was winding up his fishing reel beside her, and examining his fly-book. Katie, who was rather in awe of her master, never addressed him in general; but to-night anxiety conquered her shyness.

"Will it be fine the morn'?" she asked timidly. Ross wound away at his reel with a practised hand, and looked up into the sky for a moment.

"Aye, that it will—a grand day," he pronounced, little guessing the delight his words gave.

Katie went to bed even earlier than usual that night. She wished to prepare for the great evening by a wonderful effort of the toilet. She had seen one of the maids at the Lodge crimp her hair by means of plaiting it into a great many tiny plaits and damping them. Katie resolved to follow her example. With extraordinary patience she damped and plaited till her head was a mass of hard little knobs all over. Pride often feels a great deal of pain, in spite of the

THE PICTURES

proverb which tells the opposite, and certainly Katie felt a good deal that night. She could not rest her head for any time on the pillow, without feeling one of the knobby plaits drive into her skull, till she writhed with discomfort. Far be it from her, however, to undo the plaits—they must remain as they were at whatever cost to personal ease. So Katie tossed to and fro until the breaking of the day. She heard the lipping tide run up the sands, the cries of the sea birds, the bleating of the lambs and the answer of the sheep; she even got up and looked out of the little window, across to the blue Skye hills rising through the morning mists—but she saw them with unseeing eyes—she was thinking of nothing but the Cinema. At last, tired out with her vigil of vanity, Katie fell sound asleep. She awakened, startled, to find Mrs. Ross speaking loudly in her ear:

“Rise, Katie! Rise, an’ come doon the stair as quick’s ye can—the bairn’s got convulsions, an’ the Master’s awa’ tae Achinbeg for the doctor!”

The poor woman was so distraught with anxiety that she never noticed Katie’s most comical appearance, with the armour of plaits all over her head. She ran downstairs again to attend to the child, and Katie, still half dazed with sleep, jumped out of bed, rubbing her eyes as she struggled into her clothes.

Everything was in disorder downstairs—the fireside still choked with the ashes of last night’s fire, the cupboard doors standing open after a frantic search for medicines had been made there. Katie could see into the bedroom beyond, where Mrs. Ross stooped over the cradle of the sick child.

“Pit on the fire, lassie,” she called through to Katie, who was standing in the middle of the kitchen, bewildered by this sudden summons. “Pit on the fire, an’ boil the kettle, tak’ the bellows tae it, an’ a’ the dry sticks ye can find, an’ dinna stand glowerin’ there.”

Katie knelt down and scrabbled out the cinders on to the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

hearth with her hands; she was an untidy, badly-trained worker, and this method of going to work sent clouds of dust and wood ashes out into the room. Then she seized the big black kettle and ran out to fill it at the spout by the door. When full, it was far too heavy for her to lift easily, and she had to heave it on to the hook above the fire by a tremendous effort of all her strength. This done, she went into the bedroom to look at the baby with great curiosity. She had never seen a child in convulsions, and all was fish that came to Katie's net.

"Ech! he's twitchin' awfae!" she cried, almost enjoying the excitement if the truth be told. But she was not allowed to sate her curiosity for long. As Mrs. Ross bent over the cradle, she issued a long string of commands to Katie which might have dismayed even a practised worker:

"Get on the parritch for the men's breakfast, an' pit oot the plates an' the bannocks on the table, an' get a bit butter from the dairy, an' rin oot bye an' bring in the wee tub that's under the spout—I'm wantin' it for a bath for the bairn—an' bring ben the kettle when it's come through the boil, an' when yer through wi' a' that, gang up tae the Croft an' ask auld Annie will she come doon an' help ye wi' the kye, for I canna leave the bairn a meenit."

At this last command, Katie stood stock still in the midst of all her work, for a dreadful fear had flashed across her mind; what if the bairn wasn't better by the evening? Old Annie couldn't milk all the ten cows, and there was no other woman anywhere near who could be got to help her. Could Fortune be going to play this cruel trick upon her? But Katie might have been a student of New Thought to judge by the swiftness and vigour with which she "repelled" this unwelcome suggestion; she refused to admit it for a moment, and, as it were, banged the door in its face. Then that protective instinct which comes to the help of us all in times of anxiety taught Katie that work was the best antidote she

THE PICTURES

could find. She went plunging about the disordered kitchen, attacking one task after another, never giving herself time to think quietly in case this dreadful fear should steal into her mind again. To and fro she went, opening and shutting drawers, banging down plates and cups upon the table in a sort of maze of misery. Then the sound of the cows lowing in the byre sent her running up to the Croft to fetch old Annie and begin the milking.

As she gained the crest of the hill, Katie paused to take breath. Stretched far below her was the sea, blue and sparkling, and across the strait, clear against the cloudless heaven, the astonishing outline of the hills of Skye . . . it did not astonish Katie in the least; she was so entirely preoccupied with the thought of how she could get to the pictures, that she might have been blind, for any effect the beauties of the outer world had upon her.

She panted on up the steep little path that led to the Croft, the only cottage within miles of the farm.

Old Annie came to the door in response to Katie's knock, and eyed the child sourly. She was a most unpleasing old woman to look at, as she stood in the doorway, her hands rolled in her apron, her deep set, hard old eyes peering out from a little wrinkled face as brown as leather.

"Weel?" she asked laconically.

"Mistress Ross says," panted Katie, "will ye kindly come doon an' gie a hand wi' the kye, for the bairn's taen the convulsions an' she daurna leave him?"

Annie pushed out her under lip in an ugly grimace, and uttered a grunt that sounded like "Oo."

"Will ye come?" Katie asked again.

"She'll be payin' me for't?" Annie queried.

"She didna say," Katie had to confess; but in her eagerness to secure Annie's help she decided to encourage the idea that remuneration would be on an ample scale: "She'll be that grateful, ye ken," she said. Annie had always meant

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

to come, her hesitation had only been assumed for the sake of being disagreeable; so she flung her little "shawlie" over her head and set off down the hill with Katie. Here was Katie's opportunity; she grasped it.

"Hoo mony kye can ye mulk by yersel', Annie?" she asked.

"I've seen the day I could mulk eicht—I wouldna' care tae try mair nor five noo—I'm auld, ye ken, lassie," the old woman said. Katie was dismayed.

"Five! but there's ten o' them!" she cried. "Ech! could ye no' manage them a', Annie?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Na, na, I'm ower auld for that—but ye're a stoot lass yersel', ye can mulk the five o' them fine."

"I'll no be here the nicht—I'm tae gang tae the Picters," Katie blurted out.

The old woman stood still in the roadway, and gazed at Katie. "In a' the warl what'll that be?" she asked. As "The Movies" had not yet passed across her mental horizon, she might well be bewildered.

Katie burst into a fervent description of what she supposed the Pictures to be like, and the old woman listened with attention to all that she said, then as Katie paused for a moment, she gave her opinion on the whole matter.

"Sic a daft-like thing I niver heard tell o' in a' my days. Bide at hame, lassie, an' dinna gang stravagin' tae the tales o' that."

"Ech! I *canna* bide at hame—I maun get tae see the Picters! Will ye no' mulk a' the kye for me, Annie, an' let me gang?" Katie cried.

But she had come up against a heart as hard as flint. Her cry for help did not move Annie one whit; the deep disapproval of one generation for the amusements of another was expressed in every tone of her voice as she refused to countenance Katie's longings after pleasure.

THE PICTURES

"The lasses are a' daft for pleesuring noo," she said severely. "It's no' wurk ava, jist pleesuring."

"It's no' muckle pleesuring I get!" Katie cried. "I'm wurkin' a' the week through in the byre, exceptin' the afternoon on Thursdays. I'm up at six in the mornin' an' I'm no beddit till nine—is that no' wurk?"

But Annie would not admit that it was. Her ideas on work had been formed in the stern times when afternoons out were unknown, and four o'clock in the morning was thought none too early for a young woman to rise from bed and attack an eighteen hours' day of work.

She had just imparted these stern views to Katie when they reached the farm, and there was no more leisure for discussion.

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The doctor's hard-worked little car—as hard-worked as the doctor—did not pant up to the farm till the afternoon. It was then announced that the baby's gums must be lanced, an exciting operation which, another time, would have interested Katie mightily—to-day she was too much preoccupied with her own affairs to pay much attention to the sufferings of the baby. Her rather inept hands were indeed full, for as Mrs. Ross could not leave the child for a minute, all the work of the house devolved upon Katie.

She was deep in very unscientific preparations for dinner, when, through the open door of the kitchen, her sworn foe Flora Reid effected an entrance. Never had Flora been more importunate; but her begging this morning was for a very definite object, and did not degenerate into the usual whine for "a puckle tea" that was generally on her lips.

"Gie's twa bawbees, mistress, if *you* please," she whined, calling through to Mrs. Ross, whom she had unhappily caught sight of for a moment. Then, as Mrs. Ross paid no attention to her plea, Flora went into detail about why

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

she required the two bawbees. Ran, it appeared, had had a worse than usual attack of Mesoptamy fever last night, and hadn't the doctor in the Army told him that sulphur was the only cure; and wasn't Flora herself on the way to Achinbeg to buy the sulphur? "Jist twa bawbees, if *you* please," she chanted again and again, till Mrs. Ross, exasperated and over-easily persuaded, called to Katie to find the sum that was required. Katie sought in an old jug where pennies were kept, and produced two battered halfpennies because she thought these insignificant coins were less gratifying to Flora than the one more important one would be.

"There's for ye—there's yer twa bawbees, awa' wi' ye, I'm ower thrang the day to have ye standin' there," she told her. And Flora, grinning with the pride of success in her trade, grabbed the bawbees into her little skinny yellow hands (which were tanned to the colour of finnan haddocks by the smoke of the camp fires) and skipped out of the kitchen. Relieved of Flora's presence, Katie went on with her cooking. It is to be hoped that Ross the farmer was no epicure, for Katie's preparation of the meal left much to be desired. If you had looked into the farm kitchen that morning, you would only have seen a very untidy, plain-looking girl hard at work, and you would never have guessed at the turmoil of feeling that was raging in her heart as she gashed away at the potatoes and tore the heads off the herrings with hasty, unskilful fingers. So separated are our souls from each other, that it never occurred to Mrs. Ross that Katie was unhappy—her own anxiety had swallowed up any sympathy she might have had with the poor child at another time. As Mrs. Ross knelt beside the cradle or paced up and down with the baby in her arms, she would call out directions to Katie of one sort or another; but she had completely forgotten all about the Cinema.

Long afterwards this August day would be remembered by the mother as the one on which her child had nearly died,

THE PICTURES

while to Katie it would always just be "The Picture Day," when she had suffered such unbearable suspense.

For, as the hours dragged past, her suspense grew more and more acute. She longed to end it, by asking Mrs. Ross plainly whether she might go to the Pictures in the evening or not; but whenever she tried to ask the question, she found it impossible to speak. The jangling old kitchen clock struck five, then it struck half-past five, and Katie knew that her fate must be sealed speedily: the pictures began at half-past six, and how were the cows to be milked, she asked herself, in time to allow her to dress and drive the four long miles to Achinbeg?

At this moment little Johnnie Ross ran noiselessly in on his bare feet, and came up to where Katie stood washing the teacups in a basin of greasy water.

"Are ye no' gettin' ready, Katie?" he whispered, glancing through the half-open door that led into the bedroom, with a child's dim perception of something he didn't understand going on there.

"Weesht!" Katie warned him, "I'm no' through wi' the tea things yet."

"James is comin' along in the cairt, w'ye no' mind he's tae tak' us?" the boy whispered.

"I mind fine—but I'm no' ready yet. Ye maun pit on yer buits, Johnnie, an' yer Sunday claes, a' the folk in Achinbeg 'll be at the Picters the nicht," Katie admonished him. She was yearning to begin her own toilet, especially to see the effect when these most uncomfortable plaits should at last be undone and her hair might be combed out. It struck her that Johnnie's Sunday clothes would introduce the subject of the Pictures as well as anything. With this design in her mind she went across to the bedroom door.

Mrs. Ross, with that almost awful maternal patience that seems as if it could never tire, was still pacing up and down, up and down, as she had paced the livelong afternoon, and at

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

each step she gave a tender little touch, as regular as the beating of her own heart, to the baby's suffering body—it seemed to keep him quiet. . . .

Katie advanced into the doorway.

"Johnnie's seekin' his Sunday claes an' his buits, please," she said. "It's the Picters the nicht, ye mind . . ." she added. Her words died away into silence and she stood there dumb, awaiting her fate.

"The Picters—eh, I didna' mind—weel, get oot the lad-die's claes for him, Katie, I canna lay doon the bairn for a meenit—ye'll find them in the drawer there." Mrs. Ross spoke abstractedly, and without pausing for a moment in her slow pacing up and down the room.

Katie opened the drawer, gathered up the suit in her arms, and walked to the door; there she faced round and got the fatal question out at last.

"Will I get tae go, mistress?"

Mrs. Ross stood still and looked at her. She took in, perhaps, something of the yearning there was in Katie's face, but at that moment the baby sent up a thin trembling cry, and gave a horrible jerk in her arms.

"Ech! puir wee mannie!" she said, all her attention turned to the baby and away from Katie.

"Ye see I canna stand still a meenit," she said, then a moment later she added:

"Ye canna get tae the Picters the nicht, lassie, there's the kye tae mulk an' a' thing tae sort forbye—ye'll maybe get anither time."

"*There's no' anither time,*" poor Katie blurted out; but Mrs. Ross scarcely heeded the anguish there was in the cry. To her, fighting for the life of her child, this petty disappointment of Katie's seemed beneath contempt. She resumed her pacing again, and only repeated, as she passed Katie:

"Ye canna go, lassie, there's ower muckle tae dae."

THE PICTURES

Blind and choking with disappointment, Katie turned away without another word. As if to make things worse, she saw James the herring-man draw up his cart at the door, and heard his hearty voice call out to know if they were ready? She went to tell him the bad news; but the words stuck in her throat, and she stood there, a grotesque, sad little figure. Even to the old man's uncritical eye, Katie's appearance suggested that she was not quite ready to start for the evening's entertainment. Her whole head was covered with a sort of helmet of plaits, she wore an old faded frock, and had tied a dirty sack round her instead of an apron. The shoes she wore were large, and broken across the uppers, and had seen service in the byre all winter.

Surely, James thought, the lassie wasn't going to Achinbeg like that? He put the question in a more polite form.

"Ye'll no' be quite ready yet maybe—but there's no great hurry—I'm glad o' a rest mysel' and Maggie here's glad of a bite," he said, indicating the old black pony who was already hard at work snatching her usual mouthfuls with famished haste.

Many children of Katie's age would have begun to cry at such a crisis of misery as this was to her. But though Katie's voice was tense with the effort she had to make to keep back her sobs, she did not cry as she explained to James that she could not come with him. James was much more concerned about the baby's illness than about Katie's disappointment; to his elderly mind there was simply no comparison at all between the two distresses, and he stood there exclaiming, "Eh! I'm real sorry about the bairn, jist real sorry," and never bestowed a thought upon poor wee Katie's grief.

Then Johnnie, hastily stuffed into his Sunday clothes and a pair of loudly creaking boots, rushed out of the house and jumped into the cart, his little sunburnt face shining with soap and anticipation—never a thought did he give either to

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Katie's desolation. James got more slowly to his place in the cart and tugged up Maggie's reluctant head from the grass: a moment later and off they all went along the sunny road to Achinbeg.

Katie stood in the doorway and watched until the cart disappeared round the bend of the road. She felt as if her heart would burst with pent-up tears.

But there was no escape yet from the inexorable wheel of Duty—her grief could not be indulged in at present. For the cows came steepling down from the field in a long, slow procession on their way to the byre for the evening milking. Donald, the herd boy, appeared behind them, flourishing his stick, shouting to Rover, and trying to urge the cows beyond their usual slow pace. Fatally, Katie suspected the reason of his haste—he, even he—was going to the Pictures! He would only have time to “clean himself” (as Katie phrased it) and be off to join the jubilant crowd at Achinbeg.

She had guessed truly. As Donald drove the cows past the door, he shouted to her in huge excitement:

“I’m awa’ tae the Picters, Katie! Are ye no’ comin’?”

But he was in too great haste to wait for her reply. Then, the last cow driven in, Donald went off at a tremendous pace to clean up for the entertainment, and once more Katie was left alone. Her bitter cup was not drained to the dregs yet, however. With a rattle over the stony road, the Reids’ donkey cart drew near, Ran stalking beside it, Flora seated in the cart. Katie felt in no mood to cope with her enemy at that moment; but no tinker’s cart ever was known to pass the door of a farm without stopping at it, so there was little hope of escape from Flora. Sure enough, Ran called to the cuddy to halt, in a stentorian military voice acquired in Mesopotamia, and then, too fine (like all tinker men) to beg himself, he affected to arrange the harness while Flora slipped out of the cart and tried to dart into the kitchen as usual. But Katie barred the way.

THE PICTURES

"No' the nicht—ye'll no' get onything: the mistress has a bairn ill—awa' wi' ye!" she said roughly.

Flora persisted, and even pushed at Katie in her effort to get in through the doorway. The struggle became almost a fight, and Ran stood by and laughed delightedly. Then what did poor Katie hear? Did her ears deceive her, or did Ran address his daughter in these words:

"*Bing Avree* (come away), Flora," he cried, in the ancient lingo of his race, and then, with a sudden descent into modernity, "*We'll no' be in time for the Picters, lassie!*"

It was too much for Katie altogether. "They'll no' let tinkers in," she cried, hot with indignation and none too polite in consequence; but Flora had the best of the situation in a moment.

"I'm a sojer's bairn, an' that's mair than ye'll ever be," she assured poor Katie. "My faither's been fechin' the Germans, sae I'll get in!"

And then she began to caper about, executing a triumphant sort of jig upon the door-stone, both her skinny little hands held high above her head, while she chanted out these words:

"*Standin' room for twa bawbees, Standin' room for twa bawbees!*" and Katie saw that between the finger and thumb of each hand Flora was displaying the ha'pennies she had begged from Mrs. Ross in the morning. Truly the wicked flourish like the green bay tree: Katie, who had toiled late and early, must now continue to toil with never a ray of amusement to brighten her days, and Flora, who habitually ate the bread of idleness, was off to the Pictures on the money she had begged on false pretences. Is it any wonder that Katie's fortitude broke down as she watched the up-to-date tinkers rattle off along the road to Achinbeg? She turned away from the house and rushed into the warm darkness of the byre. There, among the cows, she was alone at last, and might weep out her bitter tears.

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THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Two hours later, when the cows had been milked, and old Annie had gone home, Katie still sat in the byre and refused to come in to the farm for supper. Her face was swollen with much weeping, and a sob would still, at long intervals, rise in her throat, though she had now dried her tears. Everything was quiet round the house; the hens had gone to roost, Rover asleep on the doorstep. Then Katie heard Ross come out, and knew that he was probably looking for her.

"Katie! Are ye there, Katie!" he called. She made no reply. Again he called:

"Come out an' ye'll see something ye'll no' see the likes of twice in a lifetime."

Katie's curiosity was faintly aroused.

"What is't?" she called back in a husky voice.

"Come you an' see," Ross persisted.

Reluctantly Katie emerged from the gloom of the byre and came out to where the farmer stood.

He pointed to the horizon. "Look West, Katie—as far's ye can see—d'ye ken that's the Island of Barra ye're seeing there—like a wee boat it's that far away? D'ye see it?"

Katie raised her swollen eyelids and gazed out towards the blazing West. The whole arch of the sky was scarlet, the sea ran in scarlet waves, and the mountains of Skye were purple against the glow. But as far as the eye could venture—so far that it seemed more like a delusion of the senses than a reality—away on the utmost horizon, another Island had become visible.

"D'ye see it! Yon's Barra! I've no' seen it for years," the farmer repeated.

But Katie did not see anything to be excited about.

She turned away without a second glance at the land that was very far off.

"I'm no' carin'," was all she said.

FINE FEATHERS

By W. W. JACOBS

MR. JOBSON awoke with a Sundayish feeling, probably due to the fact that it was Bank Holiday. He had been aware, in a dim fashion, of the rising of Mrs. Jobson some time before, and in a semi-conscious condition had taken over a large slice of unoccupied territory. He stretched himself and yawned, and then, by an effort of will, threw off the clothes and springing out of bed, reached for his trousers.

He was an orderly man, and had hung them every night for over twenty years on the brass knob on his side of the bed. He had hung them there the night before, and now they had absconded with a pair of red braces just entering their teens. Instead, on a chair at the foot of the bed was a collection of garments that made him shudder. With trembling fingers he turned over a black tail-coat, a white waistcoat, and a pair of light check trousers. A white shirt, a collar, and tie kept them company, and, greatest outrage of all, a tall silk hat stood on its own band-box beside the chair. Mr. Jobson, fingering his bristly chin, stood regarding the collection with a wan smile.

"So that's their little game, is it?" he muttered. "Want to make a toff of me. Where's my clothes got to, I wonder?"

A hasty search satisfied him that they were not in the room, and, pausing only to drape himself in the counterpane, he made his way into the next. He passed on to the others, and then, with a growing sense of alarm, stole softly down-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

stairs and making his way to the shop continued his search. With the shutters up the place was almost in darkness, and in spite of his utmost care apples and potatoes rolled on to the floor and travelled across it in a succession of bumps. Then a sudden turn brought the scales clattering down.

"Good gracious, Alf!" said a voice. "Whatever are you a-doing of?"

Mr. Jobson turned and eyed his wife, who was standing at the door.

"I'm looking for my clothes, mother," he replied, briefly.

"Clothes!" said Mrs. Jobson, with an obvious attempt at unconcerned speech. "Clothes! Why, they're on the chair."

"I mean clothes fit for a Christian to wear—fit for a green-grocer to wear," said Mr. Jobson, raising his voice.

"It was a little surprise for you, dear," said his wife. "Me and Bert and Gladys and Dorothy 'ave all been saving up for it for ever so long."

"It's very kind of you all," said Mr. Jobson, feebly—"very, but——"

"They've all been doing without things themselves to do it," interjected his wife. "As for Gladys, I'm sure nobody knows what she's given up."

"Well, if nobody knows, it don't matter," said Mr. Jobson. "As I was saying, it's very kind of you all, but I can't wear 'em. Where's my others?"

Mrs. Jobson hesitated.

"Where's my others?" repeated her husband.

"They're being took care of," replied his wife, with spirit. "Aunt Emma's minding 'em for you—and you know what she is. *H'sh!* Alf! Alf! I'm surprised at you!"

Mr. Jobson coughed. "It's the collar, mother," he said at last. "I ain't wore a collar for over twenty years; not since we was walking out together. And then I didn't like it."

"More shame for you," said his wife. "I'm sure there's

FINE FEATHERS

no other respectable tradesman goes about with a handkerchief knotted round his neck."

"P'raps their skins ain't as tender as what mine is," urged Mr. Jobson; "and besides, fancy me in a top-'at! Why, I shall be the laughing-stock of the place."

"Nonsense!" said his wife. "It's only the lower classes what would laugh, and nobody minds what they think."

Mr. Jobson sighed. "Well, I shall 'ave to go back to bed again, then," he said ruefully. "So long, mother. Hope you have a pleasant time at the Palace."

He took a reef in the counterpane and with a fair amount of dignity, considering his appearance, stalked upstairs again and stood gloomily considering affairs in his bedroom. Ever since Gladys and Dorothy had been big enough to be objects of interest to the young men of the neighbourhood the clothes nuisance had been rampant. He peeped through the window-blind at the bright sunshine outside, and then looked back at the tumbled bed. A murmur of voices downstairs apprised him that the conspirators were awaiting the result.

He dressed at last and stood like a lamb—a red-faced, bull-necked lamb—while Mrs. Jobson fastened his collar for him.

"Bert wanted to get a taller one," she remarked, "but I said this would do to begin with."

"Wanted it to come over my mouth, I s'pose," said the unfortunate Mr. Jobson. "Well, 'ave it your own way. Don't mind about me. What with the trousers and the collar, I couldn't pick up a sovereign if I saw one in front of me."

"If you see one I'll pick it up for you," said his wife, taking up the hat and moving towards the door. "Come along!"

Mr. Jobson, with his arms standing out stiffly from his sides and his head painfully erect, followed her downstairs, and a sudden hush as he entered the kitchen testified to the effect produced by his appearance. It was followed by a hum of admiration that sent the blood flying to his head.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Why he couldn't have done it before I don't know," said the dutiful Gladys. "Why, there ain't a man in the street looks a quarter as smart."

"Fits him like a glove!" said Dorothy, walking around him.

"Just the right length," said Bert, scrutinising the coat.

"And he stands as straight as a soldier," said Gladys, clasping her hands gleefully.

"Collar," said Mr. Jobson, briefly. "Can I 'ave it took off while I eat my bloater, mother?"

"Don't be silly, Alf," said his wife. "Gladys, pour your father out a nice, strong, 'ot cup o' tea; and don't forget that the train starts at ha'-past ten."

"It'll start all right when it sees me," observed Mr. Jobson, squinting down at his trousers.

Mother and children, delighted with the success of their scheme, laughed applause, and Mr. Jobson, somewhat gratified at the success of his retort, sat down and attacked his breakfast. A short clay pipe, smoked as a digestive, was impounded by the watchful Mrs. Jobson the moment he had finished it.

"He'd smoke it along the street if I didn't," she declared.

"And why not?" demanded her husband. "I always do."

"Not in a top-'at," said Mrs. Jobson, shaking her head at him.

"Or a tail-coat," said Dorothy.

"One would spoil the other," said Gladys.

"I wish something would spoil the hat," said Mr. Jobson, wistfully. "It's no good; I must smoke, mother."

Mrs. Jobson smiled, and, going to the cupboard, produced, with a smile of triumph, an envelope containing seven dangerous-looking cigars. Mr. Jobson whistled, and taking one up examined it carefully.

"What do they call 'em, mother?" he enquired. "The 'Cut and Try again Smokes'?"

FINE FEATHERS

Mrs. Jobson smiled vaguely. "Me and the girls are going upstairs to get ready now," she said. "Keep your eye on him, Bert."

Father and son grinned at each other, and, to pass the time, took a cigar apiece. They had just finished them when a swish and rustle of skirts sounded from the stairs, and Mrs. Jobson and the girls, beautifully attired, entered the room and stood buttoning their gloves. A strong smell of scent fought with the aroma of the cigars.

"You get round me like, so as to hide me a bit," entreated Mr. Jobson, as they quitted the house. "I don't mind so much when we get out of our street."

Mrs. Jobson laughed his fears to scorn.

"Well, cross the road then," said Mr. Jobson, urgently. "There's Bill Foley standing at his door."

His wife sniffed. "Let him stand," she said, haughtily.

Mr. Foley failed to avail himself of the permission. He regarded Mr. Jobson with dilated eyeballs, and, as the party approached, sank slowly into a sitting position on his doorstep, and as the door opened behind him rolled slowly over on to his back and presented an enormous pair of hob-nailed soles to the gaze of an interested world.

"I told you 'ow it would be," said the blushing Mr. Jobson. "You know what Bill's like as well as I do."

His wife tossed her head and they all quickened their pace. The voice of the ingenious Mr. Foley calling piteously for his mother pursued them to the end of the road.

"I knew what it 'ud be," said Mr. Jobson, wiping his hot face. "Bill will never let me 'ear the end of this."

"Nonsense!" said his wife, bridling. "Do you mean to tell me you've got to ask Bill Foley 'ow you're to dress? He'll soon get tired of it; and, besides, it's just as well to let him see who you are. There's not many tradesmen as would lower themselves by mixing with a plasterer."

Mr. Jobson scratched his ear, but wisely refrained from

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

speech. Once clear of his own district mental agitation subsided, but bodily discomfort increased at every step. The hat and the collar bothered him most, but every article of attire contributed its share. His uneasiness was so manifest that Mrs. Jobson, after a little womanly sympathy, suggested that, besides Sundays, it might be as well to wear them occasionally of an evening in order to get used to them.

"What, 'ave I got to wear them every Sunday?" demanded the unfortunate, blankly; "why, I thought they was only for Bank Holidays."

Mrs. Jobson told him not to be silly.

"Straight, I did," said her husband, earnestly. "You've no idea 'ow I'm suffering; I've got a headache, I'm 'arf choked, and there's a feeling about my waist as though I'm being cuddled by somebody I don't like."

Mrs. Jobson said it would soon wear off, and, seated in the train that bore them to the Crystal Palace, put the hat on the rack. Her husband's attempt to leave it in the train was easily frustrated and his explanation that he had forgotten all about it received in silence. It was evident that he would require watching, and under the clear gaze of his children he seldom had a button undone for more than three minutes at a time.

The day was hot and he perspired profusely. His collar lost its starch—a thing to be grateful for—and for the greater part of the day he wore his tie under the left ear. By the time they had arrived home again he was in a state of open mutiny.

"Never again," he said, loudly, as he tore the collar off and hung his coat on a chair.

There was a chorus of lamentation; but he remained firm. Dorothy began to sniff ominously, and Gladys spoke longingly of the fathers possessed by other girls. It was not until Mrs. Jobson sat eyeing her supper, instead of eating it, that he began to temporise. He gave way bit by

FINE FEATHERS

bit, garment by garment. When he gave way at last on the great hat question, his wife took up her knife and fork.

His workaday clothes appeared in his bedroom next morning, but the others still remained in the clutches of Aunt Emma. The suit provided was of considerable antiquity, and at closing time, Mr. Jobson, after some hesitation, donned his new clothes and with a sheepish glance at his wife went out. Mrs. Jobson nodded delight at her daughters.

"He's coming round," she whispered. "He liked the ticket-collector calling him 'sir' yesterday. I noticed it. He's put on everything but the topper. Don't say nothing about it; take it as a matter of course."

It became evident as the days wore on that she was right. Bit by bit she obtained the other clothes—with some difficulty—from Aunt Emma, but her husband still wore his best on Sundays and sometimes of an evening; and twice, on going into the bedroom suddenly, she had caught him surveying himself at different angles in the glass. And, moreover, he had spoken with some heat—for such a good-tempered man—on the shortcomings of Dorothy's laundry work.

"We'd better put your collars out," said his wife.

"And the shirts," said Mr. Jobson. "Nothing looks worse than a bad got-up cuff."

"You're getting quite dressy," said his wife, with a laugh.

Mr. Jobson eyed her seriously.

"No, mother, no," he replied. "All I've done is to find out that you're right, as you always 'ave been. A man in my persition has got no right to dress as if he kept a stall on the kerb. It ain't fair to the gals, or to young Bert. I don't want 'em to be ashamed of their father."

"They wouldn't be that," said Mrs. Jobson.

"I'm trying to improve," said her husband. "O' course, it's no use dressing up and behaving wrong, and yesterday I bought a book what tells you all about behaviour."

"Well done!" said the delighted Mrs. Jobson.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Mr. Jobson was glad to find that her opinion on his purchase was shared by the rest of the family. Encouraged by their approval, he told them of the benefit he was deriving from it; and at tea-time that day, after a little hesitation, ventured to affirm that it was a book that might do them all good.

"Hear, hear!" said Gladys.

"For one thing," said Mr. Jobson, slowly, "I didn't know before that it was wrong to blow your tea; and as for drinking it out of a saucer, the book says it's a thing that is only done by the lower orders."

"If you're in a hurry?" demanded Mr. Bert Jobson, pausing with his saucer half-way to his mouth.

"If you're in anything," responded his father. "A gentleman would rather go without his tea than drink it out of a saucer. That's the sort o' thing Bill Foley would do."

Mr. Bert Jobson drained his saucer thoughtfully.

"Picking your teeth with your finger is wrong, too," said Mr. Jobson, taking a breath. "Food should be removed in a—a—un—undemonstrative fashion with the tip of the tongue."

"I wasn't," said Gladys.

"A knife," pursued her father—"a knife should never in any circumstances be allowed near the mouth."

"You've made mother cut herself," said Gladys, sharply; "that's what you've done."

"I thought it was my fork," said Mrs. Jobson. "I was so busy listening I wasn't thinking what I was doing. Silly of me."

"We shall all do better in time," said Mr. Jobson. "But what I want to know is, What about the gravy? You can't eat it with a fork, and it don't say nothing about a spoon. Oh, and what about our cold tubs, mother?"

"Cold *tubs*?" repeated his wife, staring at him. "What cold tubs?"

FINE FEATHERS

"The cold tubs me and Bert ought to 'ave," said Mr. Jobson. "It says in the book that an Englishman would just as soon think of going without his breakfus' as his cold tub; and you know how fond I am of my breakfus'."

"And what about me and the gals?" said the amazed Mrs. Jobson.

"Don't you worry about me, ma," said Gladys, hastily.

"The book don't say nothing about gals; it says Englishmen," said Mr. Jobson.

"But we ain't got a bath-room," said his son.

"It don't signify," said Mr. Jobson. "A wash-tub'll do. Me and Bert'll 'ave a washtub each brought up overnight; and it'll be exercise for the gals bringing the water up of a morning to us."

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," said the bewildered Mrs. Jobson. "Anyway, you and Bert'll 'ave to carry the tubs up and down. Messy, I call it."

"It's got to be done, mother," said Mr. Jobson cheerfully. "It's only the lower orders what don't 'ave their cold tub reg'lar. The book says so."

He trundled the tub upstairs the same night and, after his wife had gone downstairs next morning, opened the door and took in the can and pail that stood outside. He poured the contents into the tub, and, after eyeing it thoughtfully for some time, agitated the surface with his right foot. He dipped and dried that much enduring member some ten times, and after regarding the damp condition of the towels with great satisfaction, dressed himself and went downstairs.

"I'm all of a glow," he said, seating himself at the table. "I believe I could eat a elephant. I feel as fresh as a daisy; don't you, Bert?"

Mr. Jobson, junior, who had just come in from the shop, remarked, shortly, that he felt more like a blooming snow-drop.

"And somebody slopped a lot of water over the stairs

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

carrying it up," said Mrs. Jobson. "I don't believe as everybody has cold baths of a morning. It don't seem wholesome to me."

Mr. Jobson took a book from his pocket, and opening it at a certain page, handed it over to her.

"If I'm going to do the thing at all I must do it properly," he said, gravely. "I don't suppose Bill Foley ever 'ad a cold tub in his life; he don't know no better. *Gladys!*"

"Halloa!" said that young lady, with a start.

"Are you—are you eating that kipper with your fingers?"

Gladys turned and eyed her mother appealingly.

"Page—page one hundred and something, I think it is," said her father, with his mouth full. "'Manners at the Dinner Table.' It's near the end of the book, I know."

"If I never do no worse than that I shan't come to no harm," said his daughter.

Mr. Jobson shook his head at her, and after eating his breakfast with great care, wiped his mouth on his handkerchief and went into the shop.

"I suppose it's all right," said Mrs. Jobson, looking after him, "but he's taking it very serious—very."

"He washed his hands five times yesterday morning," said Dorothy, who had just come in from the shop to her breakfast; "and kept customers waiting while he did it, too."

"It's the cold-tub business I can't get over," said her mother. "I'm sure it's more trouble to empty them than what it is to fill them. There's quite enough work in the 'ouse as it is."

"Too much," said Bert, with unwonted consideration.

"I wish he'd leave me alone," said Gladys. "My food don't do me no good when he's watching every mouthful I eat."

Of murmurings such as these Mr. Jobson heard nothing, and in view of the great improvement in his dress and manners, a strong resolution was passed to avoid the faintest

FINE FEATHERS

appearance of discontent. Even when, satisfied with his own appearance, he set to work to improve that of Mrs. Jobson, that admirable woman made no complaint. Hitherto the brightness of her attire and the size of her hats had been held to atone for her lack of figure and the roomy comfort of her boots, but Mr. Jobson, infected with new ideas, refused to listen to such sophistry. He went shopping with Dorothy; and the Sunday after, when Mrs. Jobson went for an airing with him, she walked in boots with heels two inches high and toes that ended in a point. A waist that had disappeared some years before was recaptured and placed in durance vile; and a hat which called for a new style of hair-dressing completed the effect.

"You look splendid, ma!" said Gladys, as she watched their departure. "Splendid!"

"I don't feel splendid," sighed Mrs. Jobson to her husband. "These 'ere boots feel red-'ot."

"Your usual size," said Mr. Jobson, looking across the road.

"And the clothes seem just a teeny-weeny bit tight, p'r'aps," continued his wife.

Mr. Jobson regarded her critically. "P'r'aps they might have been let out a quarter of an inch," he said, thoughtfully. "They're the best fit you've 'ad for a long time, mother. I only 'ope the gals'll 'ave such good figgers."

His wife smiled faintly, but, with little breath for conversation walked on for some time in silence. A growing redness of face testified to her distress.

"I—I feel awful," she said at last, pressing her hand to her side. "*Awful!*"

"You'll soon get used to it," said Mr. Jobson, gently. "Look at me! I felt like you do at first, and now I wouldn't go back to old clothes—and comfort—for anything. You'll get to love them boots."

"If I could only take 'em off I should love 'em better," said

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

his wife, panting; "and I can't breathe properly—I can't breathe."

"You look ripping, mother," said her husband, simply.

His wife essayed another smile, but failed. She set her lips together and plodded on, Mr. Jobson chatting cheerily and taking no notice of the fact that she kept lurching against him. Two miles from home she stopped and eyed him fixedly.

"If I don't get these boots off, Alf, I shall be a 'elpless cripple for the rest of my days," she murmured. "My ankle's gone over three times."

"But you can't take em off here," said Mr. Jobson, hastily. "Think 'ow it would look."

"I must 'ave a cab or something," said his wife, hysterically. "If I don't get 'em off soon I shall scream."

She leaned against the iron palings of a house for support, while Mr. Jobson, standing on the kerb, looked up and down the road for a cab. A four-wheeler appeared just in time to prevent the scandal of Mrs. Jobson removing her boots in the street.

"Thank goodness," she gasped, as she climbed in. "Never mind about untying 'em, Alf; cut the laces and get 'em off quick."

They drove home with the boots standing side by side on the seat in front of them. Mr. Jobson got out first and knocked at the door, and as soon as it opened Mrs. Jobson pattered across the intervening space with the boots dangling from her hand. She had nearly reached the door when Mr. Foley, who had a diabolical habit of always being on hand when he was least wanted, appeared suddenly from the off-side of the cab.

"Been paddlin'?" he enquired.

Mrs. Jobson, safe in her doorway, drew herself up and, holding the boots behind her, surveyed him with a stare of high-bred disdain.

FINE FEATHERS

"I see you goin' down the road in 'em," said the unabashed Mr. Foley, "and I says to myself, I says, 'Pride'll bear a pinch, but she's going too far. If she thinks that she can squeedge those little tootsy-wootsies of 'ers into them boo——'"

The door slammed violently and left him exchanging grins with Mr. Jobson.

"How's the 'at?" he enquired.

Mr. Jobson winked. "Bet you a level 'arf-dollar I ain't wearing it next Sunday," he said, in a hoarse whisper.

Mr. Foley edged away.

"Not good enough," he said, shaking his head. "I've had a good many bets with you first and last, Alf, but I can't remember as I ever won one yet. So long."

MY HONOURED MASTER

By C. A. DAWSON SCOTT

WILLIAM LEGGATT sat with his back to the window in order that the waning light might fall on the pages of "Tristram Shandy." The red end of a long churchwarden was between his lips, and he was smiling—a waggish, after-dinner fellow, this Sterne! Nevertheless he closed the book over a ready finger when his housekeeper, after folding the fine linen cloth and bestowing it in a table-drawer, made as if she had something to say.

"What is it, Deborah?"

The woman's dark eyes were anxious and her manner troubled. "I be sorry to tell you, sir, that I——"

"Yes, child?"

"That I must leave your service."

"Leave me?" He was as much startled as if he had suffered a physical shock; angry, too, suddenly hot and fierce. When he had been such a good master to her, the ungrateful hussy! Why, he had thought—but, tush!—at any rate she must not think she could do as she pleased. "Leave me? Stuff and nonsense!"

Her words came quickly, appeasingly. "I—I do not wish to go——"

The low-pitched, earnest voice was like the dew-fall after heat. "Then why disturb me with such a tale?" he asked, testily.

"I have my mother to keep, sir, and I have had an offer——"

He had sent the old woman fruit and vegetables from his garden, other things as well; but he could do more, would,

MY HONOURED MASTER

rather than lose Deborah. "An offer of better wages? Then that is easily arranged."

"Not exactly wages, sir, except in a manner of speaking. It is—er—Holman."

"My worthy butcher?" He understood at last. "He wants to make you Mrs. Holman?" He glanced at the trim figure in its flowered gown. Deborah had kept his house for ten years, and he had taken it for granted this happy state of affairs would continue. He had a vision of the panelled rooms, brown and restful, in which she ministered to him. He saw them without her quiet presence, that little flow of coming and going, and his heart sank. "You wish to marry Holman?"

"Not to say 'wish,' sir. A good man is Holman"—to her he was not the gallant blue-aproned butcher with steel a-swing at his waist, but a black-clad choirman of Sunday service—"a respectable, God-fearing man, but I would as soon remain my own mistress. 'Tis my mother wants to see me settled."

"Mrs. Wheal is thinking of her old age?" His sense of injury deepened. Why should these women, mother and daughter, break up his comfort? Why should Deborah suddenly show him that she had a life in which he played no part? For ten years she had belonged to him.

"Yes, sir."

He pished and pshawed. "A ring and to be Mistress This or That so that in the end your mother may have a fire by which to sit; and you, too—you, too."

"Yes, sir," but the tears had risen to Deborah's eyes, and her voice was less softly quick. The notes even dragged a little.

"I can't spare you, Deborah, and as it is not a matter of love——"

He waited for her reply. "I have a good respect for Mr. Holman, sir."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"As it is not a matter of love"—his voice had lost its peevish note—"I shall provide for your mother."

Deborah did not look altogether pleased. "You are always thoughtful for us, sir; but I am afraid she might not like to be beholden to you."

"She would not mind being beholden to Holman."

"That would be different, sir."

"Don't argue with me, Deborah, it is a bad beginning. The circumstances would be the same, for, as I can't spare you, I shall marry you myself."

He looked for her to be modestly pleased, but after the first few moments of confused surprise, during which she blushed and dropped him curtseys and was inarticulate, he found that she was refusing his offer. She could not allow her honoured master to do aught that would lower his dignity in the eyes of his fellow-townsmen. Marriage with his servant was out of the question. She knew her place too well ever to consent to such a thing.

"But I wish it," he cried when he had grasped her point of view.

"It is your goodness to me and my mother, sir; we must not impose on it."

"Nonsense"—his voice was no longer either vexed or dictatorial—"I should be giving you the security your mother demands, and you would continue to make me comfortable. It would be best for us all."

Her modest firmness withstood him through more than one urging. In the end, however, she agreed, if his brothers raised no objection, to obey him in this as she had done in all else.

George and John Leggatt, well-to-do burgesses of Webham, called on William to discuss the matter. After Deborah had shown them into the parlour she brought a tray on which was a green platter of ginger-farls and a decanter of elderberry cordial. She had made it herself, enriching it

MY HONOURED MASTER

with Spanish raisins and French brandy; and the three gentlemen, thanking her, drew in about the clear fire and drank and talked.

"I find Deborah necessary to my comfort," William said when they praised the cordial, "and, therefore, have a mind to marry her."

George was the elder, John the younger brother. "Is it wise to give a servant the place of mistress?"

William told them of the butcher. "If I get another housekeeper, she too might leave me. 'Twere best to keep Deborah, whose suitability I have proved, and I can only keep her, for good and all, by this bond."

"Ah, brother, but at your time of life to marry——"

William had not thought of himself as old, but did not contest the point. "We do not think to alter our ways. Deborah insists that she is not suited for a different station, and I would like her to please herself. We shall live as we have done these last ten years." He paused to let the announcement sink into his brothers' minds. He felt it was one which would ease them. "I must," he said presently, "remake my will, but my property will still be divided between you two, for I do not approve of alienating money from the family."

The house, the Georgian silver, the money he received from his investments would be for them and their children. "But Deborah must be provided for," said John.

William thanked him. "I am insuring my life for two thousand pounds, and shall settle that on her. The interest from it will make her passing rich."

John smiled at him. "A modest woman and a most excellent cook; it may be, brother, that you are fortunate in your choice."

"I know that I am. Deborah is like a bush of lavender. You hardly see her but you are aware of a sweetness."

The cordial had warmed their hearts, and sending for

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Deborah they gave her their good wishes, while she blushingly curtseyed and assured them that they might trust her to do her duty by her honoured master.

And William, smiling, yet looked at her a little queerly.

He had said that his marriage would not cause him to alter his way of life, and the town watched to see if he would be able to keep his word. The men feared lest a house in which they had been assured of a comfortable hospitality should change its character, their wives lest they should be called on to associate with one who had been a servant. A tentative invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Leggatt laid their fears at rest, for while Mr. Leggatt accepted Deborah humbly begged to be excused.

In time Deborah's husband's cronies, who at first had remained aloof, ventured back to the house. They found that they were fed and wined as carefully as ever, that they were encouraged to forget that such a person as Mrs. Leggatt existed. Before long, however, they dropped back to the old friendly "Deborah," glad to realise that she belonged, as she had always done, to the kitchen and service.

In church, to be sure, Deborah and her mother occupied Mr. Leggatt's pew, but, as some slight ailment often prevented his being present at the service, it hardly seemed as if they occupied it as members of the family. To his fellow-townsmen, in fact, it appeared as if William were still the bachelor to whom they were accustomed—a neat, precise man growing ripely old amid pleasant surroundings.

Nor within doors were matters much altered. At his invitation, Mrs. Wheal had been installed in the kitchen, and the still sturdy woman worked with her daughter about the house, glad to feel that by so doing, she earned the bread she ate.

Sometimes of an evening, if Mr. Leggatt were alone, he would ask Deborah to bring her work and sit with him; but,

MY HONOURED MASTER

if he had company, she remained with her mother in the kitchen. She could not be induced to do otherwise.

After that first talk with his brothers only once did William speak to them of his wife. He had been dining with George on New Year's Day, and after the usual games urged a cold as a good reason for leaving early.

The family group, brothers, their wives and their grown children, protested. Surely he would wait to see the Old Year out?

"This cold makes me an ill companion. I were better by mine own fireside," he said.

George went with him to the door. "If you had brought Deborah we should have been glad to welcome her—but of that you have been long assured."

"She says," said William, smiling, "that she knows her place. Brother, I feel that I grow old. When I am gone, do not let her modesty rob her of your kind help. Our marriage of convenience hath been a satisfactory venture."

He took his brother's hearty promise with him through the nipping air. Really unwell, he felt he might now give in and let himself be a little ill, let Deborah see what she could do in the way of spoiling him.

When she opened the door, she saw at once that his cold was worse, and, bidding him come slowly, ran to warm his bed. When he was in it, a lean old fellow, the bob of a scarlet nightcap falling over his left ear, she brought him mulled wine and tucked the blankets under the waves of feather bed. "A cold should be sweated out," quoth she, and sat herself on a chair by his side.

"I must not keep you from your rest, child."

"I like to be with you, sir," and she stayed till the perspiration stood in drops on his forehead and he was asleep.

He was not very ill; a little pain, a little weariness, a restless night or two, and he began to mend. His doctor found him growing more cheerful, beginning to make plans

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

for the spring; and Deborah, a soothing presence in the sick-room, found him less difficult to please.

One evening, she failed to bring up his supper of a convalescent—a sweetbread in white sauce. Mrs. Wheal, her black lace lappets hanging on either side of a tired face, carried in the tray. “My daughter sends her duty, sir, but she is not very well—” this was her humble way of telling him that Deborah had fainted at her work, “and hath gone to bed. She hopes to be about again to-morrow.”

He felt a little hurt. Deborah should not have fallen ill while he was still only half recovered. “What is the matter?”

“Hath a cough, sir, that gives her pain. Dr. Bellew says there is fever with it; but she begs you will not be frightened, as she is sure it is nothing much.”

William Leggatt laid down his knife and fork. “I find I have not much appetite to-night.”

“’Tis pity, sir, for I am to tell Deborah if your supper was to your mind.”

And though sweetbread and port wine had lost their flavour, he ate and drank. “Tell her how much I enjoyed it,” he said to the old woman.

She left him to his fears and the night dragged. He told himself that Deborah was young, so many years younger than he. What were a cough and a little fever? By the morrow she would be well.

Deborah had what is now known as pneumonia. She fought for her life, but she had never been strong, and in the end she found it tiring to fight.

Some time that day Mr. Leggatt, dressed with his usual precision and with a stick to aid his steps, contrived to reach the room in which she lay.

He took the doctor outside her room lest she should hear, she who took in so little of what was passing. They stood in the long, bare, echoing passage. “It cannot be,” he said,

MY HONOURED MASTER

"that I am going to get about again, and that she who is so much younger and stronger, she——"

"She has always had a weak chest." Honest man, he knew that there was little hope.

"Can we do nothing more?" The words died away down the long narrow passage, "nothing more," but the doctor did not answer.

That night, while William, still feeble but resolute to stay with her, sat by her bed, she opened her eyes for a moment. They rested on her husband's face. "Honoured Master," she murmured, and then very faintly, "my—dear—love." Her eyes closed again, but in that last moment of consciousness she had dared to utter what in life she would have thought shame to put into words.

William Leggatt went to the window and opened it for her soul to pass out. Tired and feeble, he leaned against the frame, gazing into the immensity of star-strewn space. The woman who had been everything to him was passing away. Ah, he must make haste or he might lose her in the great darkness.

When Mrs. Wheal came at dawn she found him with his face resting on Deborah's dead hand.

He had not stayed behind longer than was necessary to seek the means of a quick release.

CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN

By A. E. COPPARD

MISS SMITH, Clorinda Smith, desired not to die on a wet day. Her speculations upon the possibilities of one's demise were quite ingenuous and had their mirth, but she shrank from the figure of her dim little soul—and it was only dimly that she could figure it at all—approaching the pathways of the Boundless in a damp, bedraggled condition.

"But rain couldn't harm your spirit," declared her comforting friends.

"Why not?" asked Clorinda, "if there is a ghost of me, why not a ghost of the rain?"

There were other aspects, delectable and illusive, of this imagined apotheosis, but Clorinda always hoped—against hope be it said—that it wouldn't be wet. On three evenings there had been a bow in the sky, and on the day she died rain poured in fury. With a golden key she unlocked the life out of her bosom and moved away without fear, as if a great light had sprung suddenly under her feet in a little dark place, into a region where things became starkly real and one seemed to live like the beams rolling on the tasselled corn in windy acres. There was calmness in those translucent leagues and the undulation amid a vast implacable light until she drifted, like a feather fallen from an unguessed star, into a place which was extraordinarily like the noonday world, so green and warm was its valley.

A little combe lay between some low hills of turf, and on a green bank beside a few large rocks was a man mending a ladder of white new-shaven willow studded with large brass

CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN

nails, mending it with hard knocks that sounded clearly. The horizon was terraced only just beyond and above him, for the hills rolled steeply up. Thin pads of wool hung in the arch of the ultimate heavens, but towards the end of the valley the horizon was crowded with clouds torn and dis-battled. Two cows, a cow of white and a cow of tan, squatted where one low hill held up, as it were, the sunken limits of the sky. There were larks—in such places the lark sings for ever—and thrushes—the wind vaguely active—seven white ducks—a farm. Each nook was a flounce of blooms and a bower for birds. Passing close to the man—he was sad and preoccupied, dressed in a little blue tunic—she touched his arm as if to enquire a direction, saying “Jacob!”

She did not know what she would have asked him, but he gave her no heed and she again called to him “Jacob!” He did not seem even to see her, so she went to the large white gates at the end of the valley and approached a railway crossing. She had to wait a long time, for trains of a vastness and grandeur were passing, passing without sound. Strange advertisements on the hoardings, and curious direction posts, gathered some of her attention. She observed that in every possible situation, on any available post or stone, people had carved initials, sometimes a whole name, often with a date, and Clorinda experienced a doubt of the genuineness of some of these, so remote was the antiquity implied. At last the trains were all gone by, and as the barriers swung back she crossed the permanent way.

There was neither ambiguity in her movements nor surprise in her apprehensions. She just crossed over to a group of twenty or thirty men who moved to welcome her. They were bare-legged, sandal-footed, lightly clad in beautiful loose tunics of peacock and cinnamon, which bore not so much the significance of colour as the quality of light; one of them rushed eagerly forward, crying “Clorinda!” offer-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

ing to her a long coloured scarf. Strangely, as he came closer, he grew less perceivable; Clorinda was aware in a flash that she was viewing him by some other mechanism than that of her two eyes. In a moment he utterly disappeared and she felt herself wrapt into his being, caressed with faint caresses, and troubled with dim faded ecstasies, and recognitions not wholly agreeable. The other men stood grouped around them, glancing with half-closed cynical eyes. Those who stood farthest away were more clearly seen: in contiguity a presence could only be divined, resting only—but how admirably!—in the nurture of one's mind.

"What is it?" Clorinda asked: and all the voices replied, "Yes, we know you!"

She felt herself released, and the figure of the man rejoined the waiting group. "I was your husband Reuben," said the first man slowly, and Clorinda, who had been a virgin throughout her short life, exclaimed, "Yes, yes, dear Reuben!" with momentary tremors and a queer fugitive drift of doubt. She stood there, a spook of comprehending being, and all the uncharted reefs in the map of her mind were anxiously engaging her. For a time she was absorbed by this new knowledge.

Then another voice spoke:

"I was your husband Raphael!"

"I know, I know," said Clorinda, turning to the speaker, "we lived in Judea."

"And we dwelt in the valley of the Nile," said another, "in the years that are gone."

"And I too . . . and I too . . . and I too," they all clamoured, turning angrily upon themselves.

Clorinda pulled the strange scarf from her shoulders where Reuben had left it, and, handling it so, she became aware of her many fugitive sojournings upon the earth. It seemed that all of her past had become knit in the scarf into a compact pattern of beauty and ugliness of which she was

CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN

entirely aware, all its multiplexity being immediately resolved . . . the habitations with cave men, and the lesser human unit of the lesser later day. Patagonian, Indian, Cossack, Polynesian, Jew . . . of such the pattern was intimately woven, and there were little plangent perfect moments of the past that fell in order in the web: Clorinda watching the great seabird with pink feet louting above the billows that roared upon Iceland, or Clorinda hanging her girdle upon the ebony hooks of the image of Tanteelee. She had taken voyaging drafts upon the whole world, cataract jungle and desert, ingle and pool and strand, ringing the changes upon a whole gamut of masculine endeavour . . . from a prophet to a haberdasher. She could feel each little life lying now as in a sarsnet of cameos upon her visible breasts: thereby for these . . . these *men* . . . she was draped in an eternal wonder. But she could not recall any image of her past life in these realms, save only that her scarf was given back to her on every return by a man of these men.

She could remember with humility her transient passions for them all. None, not one, had ever given her the measure of her own desire, a strong harsh flame that fashioned and tempered its own body; nothing but a nebulous glow that was riven into embers before its beam had sweetened into pride. She had gone from them childless always, and much as a little child.

From the crowd of quarrelling ghosts a new figure detached itself, and in its approach it subdued that vague vanishing which had been so perplexing to Clorinda. Out of the crowd it slipped, and loomed lovingly beside her, took up her thought and the interrogation that came into her mind.

"No," it said gravely, "there is none greater than these. The ultimate reaches of man's mind produce nothing but images of men."

"But," said Clorinda, "do you mean that our ideals, previsions of a *vita-nuova* . . ."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Just so," it continued, "a mere intoxication. Even here you cannot escape the singular dower of dreams . . . you can be drunk with dreams more easily and more permanently than with drugs."

The group of husbands had ceased their quarrelling in order to listen; Clorinda swept them with her glances thoughtfully and doubtfully.

"Could mankind be so poor," the angel resumed, "as poor as these, if it housed something greater than itself?"

With a groan the group of outworn husbands drew away. Clorinda turned to her companion with disappointment and some dismay . . . "I hardly understand yet . . . is this all then just . . ."

"Yes," it replied, "just the ghost of the world."

She turned unhappily and looked back across the gateway into the fair combe with its cattle, its fine grass, and the man working diligently therein. A sense of bleak loneliness began to possess her; here, then, was no difference save that there were no correlations, no consequences; nothing had any effect except to produce the ghost of a ghost. There was already in the hinterland of her apprehensions a ghost, a ghost of her new ghostship: she was to be followed by herself, pursued by figures of her own ceaseless being!

She looked at the one by her side: "Who are you?" she asked, and at the question the group of men drew again very close to them.

"I am your unrealised desires," it said. "Did you think that the dignity of virginhood, rarely and deliberately chosen, could be so brief and barren? Why, that pure idea was my own immaculate birth, and I was born, the living mate of you."

The hungry-eyed men shouted with laughter.

"Go away!" screamed Clorinda to them; "I do not want you."

CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN

Although they went she could hear the echoes of their sneering as she took the arm of her new lover.

"Let us go," she said, pointing to the man in the combe, "and speak to him." As they approached the man he lifted his ladder hugely in the air and dashed it to the ground so passionately that it broke.

"Angry man! angry man!" mocked Clorinda. He turned towards her fiercely. Clorinda began to fear him; the muscles and knots of his limbs were uncouth like the gnarl of old trees; she made a little pretence of no more observing him.

"Now what is it like," said she jocularly to the angel at her side, and speaking of her old home, "what is it like now at Weston-super-Mare?"

At that foolish question the man with the ladder reached forth an ugly hand and twitched the scarf from her shoulders.

It cannot now be told to what remoteness she had come, or on what roads her undirected feet had travelled there, but certain it is in that moment she was gone . . . Why, where, or how cannot be established: whether she was swung in a blast of annihilation into the uttermost gulfs, or withdrawn for her beauty into that mysterious Nox, into some passionate communication with the eternal husbands, or into some eternal combat with their passionate other wives . . . from our scrutiny at least, she passed for ever.

It is true there was a beautiful woman of this name who lay for a month in a deep trance in the West of England. On her recovery she was balladed about in the newspapers and upon the halls for quite a time, and indeed her notoriety brought requests for her autograph from all parts of the world, and an offer of marriage from a Quaker potato merchant. But she tenderly refused him and became one of those faded old maids who wear the virginity like antiquated armour.

MEKTUB

By R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

ALL Tangier knew the Rubio, the fair-haired blind man, who sat upon the mounting-block outside the stables of the principal hotel. His bright red hair and bleared blue eyes, together with his freckled face, looking just like a newly scalded pig, had given him the name by which the Europeans knew him, although no doubt he was Mohammed, something or another, amongst his brethren in the faith.

He spoke indifferently well most European languages up to a point, and perfectly as far as blasphemy or as obscenity was concerned, and his quick ear enabled him as if by magic to ascertain the nationality of any European passer-by, if ever he had spoken to the man before, and to salute him in his mother-tongue.

All day he sat, amused and cheerful, in the sun. Half faun, half satyr, his blindness kept him from entire materialism, giving him sometimes a half-spiritual air, which possibly may have been but skin deep, and of the nature of the reflection of a sunset on a dunghill; or again, may possibly have been the true reflection of his soul as it peeped through the dunghill of the flesh.

As people passed along the road, their horses slithering and sliding on the sharp pitch of the paved road, which dips straight down from underneath the mounting-block of the hotel, between the tapia walls, over which bougainvilleas peep, down to the Soko Grande, El Rubio would hail them, as if he had been a dark lighthouse, set up to guide their steps.

Occasionally, but rarely, he mistook his mark, hailing

MEKTUB

some European lady with obscenity, or bawling to the English clergyman that he could tell him "where one fine girl live, not more than fifteen year"; but his contrition was so manifest, when he found his mistake, that no one bore him malice, and he remained an institution of the place and a perpetual rent-charge on all passers-by.

By one of the strange contradictions which Nature seems to take delight in just to confound us, when after a few thousand years of study we think we know her ways, the Rubio had a love of horses which in him replaced the usual love of music of the blind. No one could hold two or three fighting stallions better, and few Moors in all the place were bolder riders—that is, on roads he knew. Along the steep and twisting path that leads towards Spartel he used to ride full speed and shouting "Balak" when he was sent upon a message or with a horse from town out to the villas on the hill. All those who knew him left him a free road, and if he met a herd of cattle or of sheep, the horse would pick his way through them, twisting and turning of his own accord, whilst his blind rider left the reins upon his neck and galloped furiously. In what dark lane or evil-smelling hole he lived no European knew. Always well-dressed and clean, he lived apart both from the Moors and from the Europeans, and in a way from all humanity, passing his time, as does a lizard, in the sun and in the evening disappearing to his den. The missions of the various true faiths, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Anglican, had tackled him in vain. Whether it was that none of them had anything to offer which he thought better than the cheerful optimism with which he was endowed by nature to fight the darkness of the world he lived in, is difficult to say. Still, they had all been worsted; not that the subject of their spiritual blandishments could have been termed a strict Mohammedan, for he drank any kind of spirits that was presented to him by Christians, anxious perhaps to make him break the spirit, if they were impotent to

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

move him in the letter of his law. Still though he sat with nothing seemingly reflected on the retina of his opaque and porcelain-coloured eyes, his interior vision was as keen or keener than that of other men. He never seemed a man apart, or cut off from his fellows, but had his place in life, just as throughout the East the poorest and most miserable appear to have, not barred out from mankind by mere externals as are their brethren in the North, shut in the ice of charity, as bees are shut behind a plate of glass so that the rich may watch their movements in the hive.

Up from the Arab market over which he sat, as it were, presiding in his darkness, just as God seems to sit, presiding blindly, over a world which either mocks Him, or is mocked at by Him, there came a breath of Eastern life, bearing a scent compounded of the acrid sweat of men, dried camel's dung, of mouldering charcoal fires, of spices, gunpowder, and of a thousand simples, all brought together by mere chance or fate, a sort of incense burned in his honour, and agreeable to his soul. It seemed to bring him life, and put him into touch with all he could not see, but yet could feel, almost as well as if he saw, just as did other men.

Sniffing it up, his nostrils would dilate, and then occasionally a shadow crossed his face, and as he ran his hands down the legs of the horse left in his charge, marking acutely any splint or spavin they might have, he used to mutter, half in a resigned, half in an irritated way, "Mektub," the sole profession of his faith that he was ever heard to make, for if a thing is written down by fate, it follows naturally that there is somebody who writes, if only foolishly. Whether the mystic phrase of resignation referred to his condition or to the possible splint upon the horse's leg, no one could tell, but as the shadow passed away, as quickly as it came, he soon fell back again into the half-resigned good humour of the blind, which, like the dancer's lithographic smile, seems quite involuntary.

MEKTUB

Years melted into one another, and time sauntered by, just as it always must have sauntered in the town where hours are weeks, weeks months, and months whole years, and still the hum of animals and men rose from the Arab market, and still the shadows in the evening creeping on the sand seemed something tangible to the blind watcher on his stone. Not that he cared for time, or even marked its flight, or would have cared to mark it, had it been pointed out to him, for life was pleasant, the springs of charity unfailing, wit ever present in his brain, and someone always had a horse to hold, to which he talked, as it stood blinking in the sun. His blindness did not seem to trouble him, and if he thought of it at all, he looked on it as part and parcel of the scheme of nature, against which it is impious to contend. Doctors had peered into his eyes with lenses, quarrelled with one another on their diagnosis of his case, and still the Rubio sat contented, questioning nothing and enduring everything, sun, rain, wind, flies, and dust, as patiently as if he were a rock. Nothing was further from his thoughts than that he ever once again could see. Plainly, it had been written in the books of fate he should be blind, and so when European doctors talked to him of operations and the like, he smiled, not wishing to offend, and never doubting of their learning, for had not one of them cured a relation of his own of intermittent fever by the use of some magic white powder, when native doctors, after having burned him with a red-hot iron, and made him take texts of the Koran steeped in water, had ignominiously failed?

All that they said did not appeal to him, for all of them were serious men, who talked the matter over gravely, and looked on him as something curious on which to exercise their skill. All might have gone in the same old way, and to this day the Rubio still sat upon his stone without a wish to see the horses that he held, the sunlight falling white upon the towers, or the red glare upon the Spanish coast at even-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

tide, had not a German scientist appeared on the horizon of his life.

From the first day on which the Rubio held the doctor's horse a fellowship sprang up between them, not easy to explain. No single word of Arabic the doctor spoke, and all the German that the Rubio knew was either oburgatory or obscene, and yet the men were friends. Tall and uncouth and with a beard that looked as if it never had been combed, his trousers short and frayed and with an inch or two of dirty sock showing between them and his shoes, dressed in a yellowish alpaca jacket, and a white solar topee lined with green, the doctor peered out on the world through neutral-tinted glasses, for his own eyes were weak.

Whether this weakness drew him to the blind, or if he liked to hear the Rubio's tales about the Europeans he had known, to all of whom he gave the worst of characters, calling them drunkards and hinting at dark vices which he averred they practised to a man—not that he for a moment believed a single word he uttered, but thought apparently his statements gave a piquancy to conversation—the doctor never said. Soon Tangier knew him for a character, and as he stumbled on his horse about the town, curing the Arabs of ophthalmia and gathering facts for the enormous book he said he meant to write upon North Africa, his reputation grew. The natives christened him "Father of Blindness," which name appeared to him a compliment, and he would use it, speaking of himself, complacently, just as a Scotsman likes to be spoken of under the style and title of the land he owns, although it be all bog. Though in the little world of men in which he lived the doctor was a fool, in the large field of science he was competent enough, and when he proved by demonstration to the other doctors in the place that a slight operation would restore the Rubio's sight, they all fell in with it, and though for years the object of their care had held their horses and they had seen him every

MEKTUB

day, without observing him, he now became of interest, just as a moth becomes of interest when it is dead and put into a case with other specimens.

Whether the sympathy that certainly exists between wise men and those whose intellect is rudimentary, and which is rarely manifested between a learned and an ordinary man, prevailed upon the Rubio to submit himself to the ministration of the German man of science, Allah alone can tell. A season saw the mounting-block deserted, and tourists gave their horses to be held by boys, who tied them by the reins to rings high in the wall, and fell asleep, leaving the animals to fight and break their bridles, and for a time no stream of cheerful blasphemy was heard, in any European tongue, upon the mounting-stone. In a clean unaccustomed bed in a dark corner of Hope House, the missionary hospital, the Rubio lay, his head bound up in bandages, silent, but cheerful, confident in the skill of his strange friend, but yet incredulous, after the Arab way.

During the long six weeks, what were his thoughts and expectations it is difficult to say. Perhaps they ran upon the wonders of the new world he would inherit with his sight, perhaps he rather dreaded to behold all that he knew so well and so familiarly by touch. He who, when like a lizard he had basked against his wall, had never for a moment ceased from talking, now was silent, and when the doctor visited him, to dress his eyes, and make his daily diagnosis of the case, answered to all the words of hope he heard, "It will be as God wishes it to be," and turned uneasily between his unfamiliar sheets. At last the day arrived when doctors judged the necessary time had passed. No one in Tangier was more confident than the "Father of Blindness," who went and came about the town buoyed high with expectation, for he was really a kind-hearted man, learned but simple, after the fashion of his kind.

At early morning all was ready, and in the presence of the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

assembled doctors of the place with infinite precaution the dressings were removed. Cautiously and by degrees, a little light was let into the room. Holding his patient's hand and visibly moved, the German asked him if he saw. "Not yet," the Rubio answered, and then, throwing the window open wide, the sunlight filled the room, falling upon the figure in the bed, and on the group of doctors standing by expectantly. It filled the room, and through the window showed the mountains standing out blue above Tarifa, and the strait, calm as a sheet of glass, except where the two "Calas" cut it into foam. It fell upon the cliffs which jut into the sea below Hope House; upon the hills of Anjera, and on the bird-like sails of the feluccas in the bay, filling the world with gladness that a new day was born. Still on his bed the Rubio lay, pale with his long confinement, and with his hands nervously feeling at his eyes. All saw that the experiment had failed, and with a groan the German man of science buried his head between his hands and sobbed aloud, the tears dimming his spectacles and running down upon his beard. With a grave smile the patient got out of his bed, and having felt his way to where he heard the sobs, laid his rough, freckled hand upon the shoulder of his friend, and said as unconcernedly, as if he had not suffered in the least, "Weep not; it was not written"; then, looking round, asked for a boy to lead him back again to his accustomed seat upon his stone.

THE FLOWER

A dialogue by GEORGE RESTON MALLOCH

The scene is a small, low-roofed room in a cottage.

A very old man is sitting in a big armchair beside a latticed casement window, which is closed.

A girl is sitting near him.

THE GIRL: It's time for your medicine, grandfather.

THE OLD MAN: Eh?

THE GIRL (*a little louder*): It's time for your medicine. (*She gets up and pours out a spoonful from a bottle on the table.*)

THE OLD MAN: Medicine? I don't want it, my dear.

THE GIRL (*at his side*): Oh, but you must take it, grandfather—and it'll do you good, you know.

THE OLD MAN: Must, eh? Very well—very well—carefully, carefully—don't spill it—don't spill it.

(*She puts the spoon to his lips and he takes the dose.*)

THE GIRL: There! That'll make you feel better.

THE OLD MAN: Nasty stuff—nasty stuff. I hope you'll never live long enough to need it. Wipe my mouth.

THE GIRL (*wiping his lips with a handkerchief*): Oh, what an unkind thing to say! You don't want me to die young, do you?

THE OLD MAN: I don't know but what you'd be happier if you did—happier if you did! When you get to my age, you'll have forgotten what it is to be happy—and a lot of other things. It hurts me to try to recall things now. I've forgotten most things—most things.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

THE GIRL (*resuming her seat and work*): Oh, you mustn't talk like that! Why, we're all so proud of you, living to be the oldest man in the village.

THE OLD MAN: Oh, yes—yes—yes. I suppose I am. (*Chuckles in a senile way.*) That's true. It was thought at one time that old John Smithers would beat me—but he's gone—he's gone, poor fellow—these five years, they tell me. I've beaten him—I've beaten him. I was never one to give in. Proud of me, are you? Who's proud of me?

THE GIRL: Why, every one is—father is——

THE OLD MAN: Proud of me, is he—is he? Likes something to boast about, I daresay—we're all like that in our family—I was like that myself, once. When I was a boy, I used to boast that Uncle Will had a wooden leg that he got at the wars. Proud of me, is he? Well, he used to be fond of me, once upon a time. But who could be fond of an old, broken-down fellow like me—a tottering old fellow like me! So now he's proud of me—ah, well—he has to say that—a good-hearted lad enough! And your mother—is she proud of me, too?

THE GIRL: Oh, yes, grandfather—of course she is!

THE OLD MAN: Well, well—she would be, naturally. She's got the neighbours to think of. She was never very fond of me—she was always proud herself, in her way—in her way. Couldn't bear pity from anyone—couldn't bear pity—couldn't give it. And so she's proud of me? And you—are you proud of me, my dear?

THE GIRL: What funny questions you ask! You know I'm very fond of you, grandfather.

THE OLD MAN: Ah—you mean you think you are—settle my cushions—my back's hurting me again—you mean that you think you are. (*The girl arranges his cushions and resumes her seat.*) You think you are—you're young enough for that. What sort of day is it? Fine—eh?

THE FLOWER

THE GIRL: Oh yes—a beautiful day! The sun's so bright——

THE OLD MAN: I thought I could see it. I can feel it on my hands, I think.

THE GIRL: And the birds are singing so beautifully—everything seems happy and glad to be alive. Shall I open the window a little so that you can feel the wind—it's so warm—and hear the birds?

THE OLD MAN: No, no—I can't hear them at all, window open or not—it just sounds like nothing at all. I used to write poetry when I was a lad—some of it was printed in the county paper—about birds singing—and now I can't hear 'em at all.

THE GIRL: The garden's looking so lovely to-day—full of flowers that have come out in the sun of the last day or two—and bees humming about in them.

THE OLD MAN: I couldn't see 'em. And I'd be cold if you opened the window.

THE GIRL: Why, it's so hot to-day!

THE OLD MAN: Yes, but I'd be cold, all the same. I've not been able to go in the garden for a long time now—a long time. Who looks after it? Did you get the seeds in—and the roses pruned?——

THE GIRL: Oh yes—I did it myself.

THE OLD MAN: Eh? Your father did it himself?

THE GIRL: No—I did it, grandfather. Father says he can't be bothered with gardening—he says it is for young people, or very old people. You see, he's so interested in golf, since the new course was opened.

THE OLD MAN: Ah yes—of course—of course. Too little for him—too much for me—too much for me. And the mill looks after itself while he plays at golf—it wasn't so in my time—in my time.

THE GIRL: Would you like me to read to you? I've finished my sewing now.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

THE OLD MAN: Read to me? Yes—yes—I would if I could hear you—but I'd fall asleep before you'd gone so far as a page—I'd fall asleep. I don't want to sleep. I've been sleeping too much—I'm always sleeping. I'd fall asleep.

THE GIRL: But that wouldn't matter.

THE OLD MAN: Eh? Wouldn't matter? Not to you—oh yes, I daresay you'd rather I fell asleep—quite natural, my dear, quite natural. But it matters to me, you see. I know that I fall asleep. There—there—you read to me—read to me.

THE GIRL (*getting up and going to the bookshelf*): What shall it be?

THE OLD MAN: Eh? I don't know. Poetry—that's quickest—that's the thing to put you asleep quickly—the rhythm of it soon puts you to sleep when you're old. I used to sit up all night writing poetry when I was a lad. Eh, my dear—just fetch that book of my own—the verses that were printed in the county paper—they're all pasted in a book—read me a bit of that, if you like—to put me asleep—

THE GIRL: But it isn't here, is it? I've never seen it—

THE OLD MAN: No—none of them were over fond of it—they said I was a fool to waste my time—perhaps they were right—perhaps they were right. But I used to read it myself, sometimes of an evening by myself. Run up to my old room and you'll find it—in the leather trunk—right at the bottom, under a lot of things—unless your mother has tidied it away—it's years since I saw it, and she's fond of tidying things away.

THE GIRL: All right, grandfather—I'll look——

(She goes out of the room. The old man sits nodding in his chair in the sunshine. He dozes. The girl comes back with a book.)

THE GIRL: I've got it—but it was so dusty I had to clean it.

(She goes to her former seat.)

THE FLOWER

THE OLD MAN: (*waking with a start*): Eh? Eh? Got what?

THE GIRL: Why, the book you sent me for, grandfather. It was buried under a lot of rubbish in the old box—*inches thick with dust.*

THE OLD MAN: Oh, yes. Yes—yes—I daresay—I dare-say. It's a long time—a long time.

THE GIRL (*opening the book*): What shall I read?

THE OLD MAN: Are you going to read?

THE GIRL: Grandfather, you asked me to go upstairs and get this book just now. It has your old verses in it. You wanted me to read them to you. Where shall I begin? (*Turns over some pages.*) Why——

THE OLD MAN: Eh? Eh?

THE GIRL: Why—there's a flower pressed between two of the pages.

THE OLD MAN: A flower—eh? A flower?

THE GIRL: Yes. It's stuck on a little scrap of paper—it's been white paper, but it's turning yellow with age. I'm afraid to touch it, it's so old. It looks as if it would fall to pieces if I moved it.

THE OLD MAN: A flower, eh? A flower—in my book——

THE GIRL: There's some writing on the paper—in pencil. It's so faded I can't read it.

THE OLD MAN: Let me see it—no—what's the use? I can scarcely see the sunlight—I couldn't make it out—if your eyes can't.

THE GIRL: Wait a minute! I believe I can just make something out. It's written across the bit of paper the flower was pressed on—it's got stained when it was drying. Something, "dearest—dearest—of—a-l-l—dearest of all." I've got it! "This was—the dearest woman of all." And then there's something about heart "heart imprisoned—she has it for eternity."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

THE OLD MAN: Whose writing is it?

THE GIRL: Yours, grandfather—it's like yours used to be, only not so shaky.

THE OLD MAN: Say it again—read it again—what it says.

THE GIRL: "This was—the—the dearest woman of all." Then something about "heart imprisoned on earth—she has it for eternity."

THE OLD MAN: I seem to have heard it before. If I could only remember—it seems familiar. This was the dearest woman of all. It seems familiar. You're sure it's my writing?

THE GIRL: I think so, grandfather.

THE OLD MAN: Ah, well—when you're as old as I am, it hurts to try and remember things. I can't recall it—no—no. What sort of flower is it?

THE GIRL: I don't know. It's so faded. It might have been a primrose by its shape.

THE OLD MAN: A primrose—eh? Settle my cushion again—my back's aching—it's very bad to-day. A primrose—a primrose? Why—why....I almost....seem....to remember....something....no....no....it's funny—I can't catch it. It's like a shadow of something that hurts my head. Who was she—eh? Who was she?

THE GIRL: Why, grandmama, of course!

THE OLD MAN: No. No, no—it wasn't your grandmother. She was fair—she was fair....wasn't she....eh? Yes—my wife was fair—

THE GIRL: Yes, grandfather, she had lovely golden hair—mother has often told me about it.

THE OLD MAN: I thought she had. My memory's not so strong, nowadays—but I thought she had fair hair. Not so strong. But this one—she was dark—she was dark—

THE GIRL: Then you remember her?

THE OLD MAN: I wish I could—I wish I could.

THE FLOWER

THE GIRL: Someone you knew before you met grand-mama?

THE OLD MAN: Oh, no. No. No. Afterwards. Long afterwards. This was the dearest woman of all—I've forgotten—I've forgotten. There were a lot of them—I was always plagued by women. They would give me no peace——

THE GIRL: Grandfather! Now I understand what mother meant—oh, nothing!

THE OLD MAN: Yes, they plagued me—they did. You wouldn't think it to see me now, would you—eh? Eh? I was a strong man, child—a big, tall fellow, like your sweet-heart, Tom—only handsomer—handsomer. Handsome Will, they called me in the village, I'm told—handsome Will. And now I can't see, can't hear, can't feel, can't move, can't remember—can't remember. And I sit here shaking, shaking, shaking, till I'll shake the life out at last. Yes—I was like Tom—Tom's like me.

THE GIRL: Oh, he's not!

THE OLD MAN: Tom's got the like of me under his skin for all his strength—for all his strength. We've all got to grow old.

THE GIRL: Oh—you're frightening me!

THE OLD MAN: Eh? This was the dearest woman of all—and I can't remember anything about her—I can't remember—it hurts my head.

THE GIRL: Tom will never forget me!

THE OLD MAN: Does he say so—say so?

THE GIRL: He swears it!

THE OLD MAN: Ah, I daresay, I daresay. He doesn't mean to forget, maybe, maybe. But—oh, my old head'll burst if I go on trying to remember. A primrose, you said, eh? Eh?

THE GIRL: Yes, grandfather.

THE OLD MAN: They come in spring—I remember that.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Yes—yes—ah, now—I begin to....spring....that spring
....who was she? Who was she? I seem to....dark hair
....dark hair....dark eyes....big eyes....eh? A red
mouth....very soft....a wood....the High Spinney, where
the primroses grow....and she kissed me....she kissed me.
Why? Why did she kiss me? It's a long time ago—I think
I knew her a long time ago—a long time—years. I think I
loved her—but why....when? Where? Who was she? It's
ten years since I took to the house all shaking like this—
isn't it—eh?

THE GIRL: Yes.

THE OLD MAN: Well—I seem to remember that when
I sat here at first, I still thought of her—still thought of
her—a lot. And I could see her in my mind then, I think
....I knew what she was like....but it's all shaken away
....it's all shaken away. I can't remember.

THE GIRL: But, grandfather—grandmama?—

THE OLD MAN: Oh, I never loved your grandmother
like that. No, no. She was a good wife—a good wife.
But this one—who was she——? The dearest woman of
all....there are holes in life....even when you can re-
member....women are strange—strange. Your grand-
mother....I daresay she loved me in her way....but....
well, well, she had religion—that helped her, no doubt....
there are two kinds of women....the women who give them-
selves with a look of tragedy....and the women who give
themselves with a smile....your grandmother was one of
the tragic ones. This woman....was one of the others....

THE GIRL: Oh! (*She sits looking at him with horror.*)

THE OLD MAN: Yes....that was how. I remember now.
She was dark. She was sad, often, in her way. It made me
glad just to look at her....I remember telling her that....
she liked it. Oh, if I could remember....just a little....
she's dead now, I think....yes, I think so. Wasn't it just
before....or a long time before I took to this chair? She

THE FLOWER

was growing old, too, you see....we'd waited and waited
....for years....and years....and then she died....like
that....the dearest woman of them all....(*he begins to nod*).

THE GIRL: Grandfather—are you going to sleep?

THE OLD MAN (*starting*): Eh? Eh? And I can't remember her name....(*begins to nod again*).

THE GIRL: Grandfather—it's time to take your medicine again.

THE OLD MAN: Eh? I don't want it. Be careful—be careful—don't spill it. (*Swallows the dose she gives him.*)
Your grandmother—wipe my mouth—
(*She wipes his lips.*)

your grandmother had religion—she thought we'd see people again——

THE GIRL: God tells us in His Word that we shall.

THE OLD MAN: Then perhaps I'll see her again—the dearest woman of them all....I've forgotten what she's like....but it sounds like a word of God, that, somehow....the dearest woman of all (*he begins to nod*)....for eternity....I can't remember....her name....

(*He falls asleep.*)

THE MARE WITHOUT A NAME

By ERNEST RHYS

I

THE redoubled output of Wittonhoe Old Pit called for more Galloways for the Busty Seam, and one Saturday morning a goods-train, with a consignment of ten, ran into the railway sidings. Marable, the horsekeeper underground, and two stablemen, were there to disembark them; and I—it was my first year's 'prenticeship to mining engineering—went, curious to see how they would take to subterranean life in the Busty Coal Seam. They came in cattle-trucks, roughly divided into headstalls or pens, and the last of the batch to sniff and baulk at the gangway was a little mare that set us staring with wonder. She was about the usual height of a good Galloway, a matter of 14 hands; but she seemed of another breed altogether. You would have thought she had Arab blood in her. She was so light on her feet, she danced down the planks and seemed hardly to feel the ground; and she moved with a swaying to and fro of her deer's head in a way to make you think of open moors and flowing airs. The gleaming sun was delighted with her bay coat.

The road from the siding to the pit-mouth lay along the colliery tramway and over a high bridge that crossed the River Brune. When she came to this bridge approach, walking last in the string, she suddenly stopped. Kit Pout, the stableman who held her leading-rope, could not, do what he would, persuade her to budge a step further. The river there made a wide curve, and the meadows on either side had not been, at that day, buried under huge heaps of pit-

THE MARE WITHOUT A NAME

waste, and were April-green after the recent rains. The little mare threw her head up and down, snuffed the air with sensitive, dilating nostrils, and pawed the ground, as if in a craze of ecstasy to have escaped the train after that wearisome, long journey. Then she got restive, danced sideway, and reared. Kit Pout could barely hold her, and soon lost his temper. He cursed her with murderous oaths, and jerked her head down with a savage, sawing pull, that almost broke her fine jaws. But she was too much for him. In a moment she had lashed out at the old fool and sent him spinning. She went away like the wind at that, down the high embankment, and along the clumps of thorn and hazel at the meadow-side, making light of every dike, leaping the hedges like a run stag.

The chase was not easy to take up; it meant a long detour to reach her vanishing point, where the colliery fields ended, and the pastures of Low Finings Farm began. Kit Pout's cry of rage had brought back Marable, the horsekeeper. He had a feeling for a horse, and stared after the runaway with mixed dismay and delight.

"Ma hinnies!" he said, "she's a goer, that one; she's a Northumberland Plater! Look at her!"

"She's brakt my shin!" said Kit Pout; "wait till aä get hould on her."

"Ye auld sump!" said Marable, "ye're not fit to handle a little race-mear like her. Ye s'uld have treated her canny."

"Aä'll treat her to summat," said Kit Pout.

2

There was reckless hunting that day after the lost mare; Marable and I saddled two Galloways, and rode miles up the Brune, tracking her. We lost her hoofmarks at last in the river, five or six miles away; and no one had seen her or heard tell of her along the road or at the next village of Bruneford. But that evening, as I was locking up the view-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

er's office, a lad from the Finings Farm brought me a message from his master, Matthew Clarke, saying he would like to see me that evening.

Matthew was both horse-breeder and sheep-farmer. He bred four or five horses every season, and often gave me a mount, or asked me in to a farmer's tea and a game of cards or chequers. When I arrived, he led me to the stables; there was the lost mare, with sandy streaks on her forelegs, and marks of dry blood still on her jaw where Kit Pout had given her that devil's wrench.

She had made her way at last to an upland field, far above High Finings, where two of Clarke's colts were running at grass. After some trouble—and Matthew had a way with him no wise beast could resist—he had got her down here. Then, at a loss to account for the ownership of the creature, it occurred to him that she might be part of the Wittonhoe Pit stud.

When he heard her story, first he laughed a grim laugh, then patted her cheek and her flank, and examined her.

"Man! 'T'd be a cruel shame to send her down yon shaft. She's no Galloway, but a bit of real fine breed. I'd swop any Galloway and twenty pounds for her if I saw her at Stagshawbank Fair."

Well she understood—"ears up-prick'd"—that Matthew understood her; she rubbed her deer's head confidently on his shoulder while he spoke.

"She's that starved with her railway journey," he said, "and her mouth's *that* sore, she cannot eat. I'll give her a bran-mash."

We consulted what further we could do; whether we could possibly get Wittonhoe Pit to part with her. But there was no hope of it. The chief viewer, or manager, was a strict man-of-habit. She had been sent to him for a Galloway, to work in the Busty Seam, and a pit-Galloway she had to be.

"She'll never stand it," said Matthew; "she won't take her

THE MARE WITHOUT A NAME

feed down there, you can be sure of that. I give her a month!"

The following night they blindfolded her, and down she went.

3

Marable, the horsekeeper, knew his trade. He did all he could to humour her. The pick of the oats, the sweetest hay, the cleanest-drawn water, the airiest stall, were hers. And he spent hours grooming her silken coat.

"Now," said he, when I went in on the second day to look at her, and brought her some coarse salt—on Matthew's suggestion; "now if we could nob-but find a name for her, she might do varra weel."

I suggested two or three. "What do you say to Medina? She's like an Arab, and that's an Arab name."

"She's no Dinah; Dinah is a darkie—a genooine nigger! This one is gotten gold thread in her mane."

"Fatima, then?"

"She's not fat, nor ivor like to be. Hold on, sir—I saw a name on a cream-coloured pony Boneyparty used to ride. We have his biography in the hoose; and I'll look it up.—Charlie, mind me to hunt up that pony's name, and we'll christen her proper. I've fair lost me heart to this little harab."

As I left the stable, a set of tubs was coming outby, drawn at a gallop by a strong Galloway, "Champion," the pick of the Wittonhoe Pit stables. I stood back to avoid the flying coal-dust and the splash of a black puddle between the rails.

The Galloway was travelling for all he was worth, his eyeballs fixed and strained unnaturally, his neck thrust out quite straight from his shoulders, his breath snorting hot and hard. It was a terrific display of a strong creature putting out every ounce of exacted force. I went away, very down in the mouth, thinking of the little "harab."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

4

Marable did all he could, as I said. It was of no use. She only ate pretended mouthfuls of hay; and her sighs were such as I have never heard horse utter before or since. And when they took her out and tried to harness her to a set of tubs, she became fiend-possessed, and kicked right and left. Three times she was taken back and three times given a respite.

Then came a desperate last attempt, when she fairly drove in the planks of one tub and terrified the reckless putters and drivers. The end of it was she burst her traces, and set off up the main-way at a terrific pace. She galloped on till she saw the lights of a set of tubs approaching, and turned off sharp into some old workings, breaking her way through the brattice that fenced off the return airway.

I am thankful that that last event was spared me. When she came to a low-roofed headway, where there was not room enough for her to travel, she forced her way in somehow, scrambling on her knees into the blind alleys. There, making fearful groans, she "scraffled on"—Marable's word—to what seemed an impossible last place of retreat, in the stythe and darkness. The men had come up with lights by that time. They had got near enough to see her on the ground, lashing with her hoofs, and knocking out the pit-props like ninepins on either side. This brought the end. The roof-stone, left without support, came down with a rush. The men ran back, and, as they ran, heard her scream—"just like a seized woman."

"Aä call it detarmined suicide, if ever there was one," said Marable.

That night, the old working—already closed at its further end—was by the overman's orders walled up. There the mare without a name rests, waiting the resurrection-day of the sun-lovers.

WHY SENATH MARRIED

By F. TENNYSON JESSE

SENATH LEAR was neither a pretty woman nor a particularly young one, but having in the first instance embraced spinsterhood voluntarily, she was cheerfully resigned to its enforced continuance. All the world knew she had been "asked" by Samuel Harvey of the Upper Farm, and though all the world considered her a fool for refusing him, it still could not throw in her face the taunt that she had never had a chance.

She had said no to Samuel because at that time she was young enough—being but twenty—to nurse vague yearnings for something more romantic than the stolid Sam, but the years fled taking with them the bloom that had been her only beauty, and romance never showed so much as the tip of a wing-feather.

"I'm doubtful but that you were plum foolish to send Sam'l Harvey to another woman's arms, Senath," her mother told her once, "but there, I never was one for driving a maid. There's a chance yet; ef you'll look around you'll see 'tes the plain-featured women as has the husbands."

"'Tes because the pretty ones wouldn't have en, I fear," said Senath on a gleam of truth, but with a very contented laugh, "men's a pack of trouble in the flesh. I would ha' wed sure 'nough ef et hadn' been that when you get to know a man you see him as somethen' so different from your thought of him."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Eh, you and your thoughts . . ." cried the petulant old mother, quoting better than she knew, "they'll have to be your man and your childer, too."

Senath, the idealist, was well content that it should be so, and when her mother's death left her her own mistress, she went to live in a tiny cottage up on the moors with no companions but those thoughts—the thoughts at once crude and vague, but strangely penetrating—of an untaught mind whose natural vigour has been neither guided nor cramped by education.

Her cottage, that stood four-square in the eye of the wind, was set where the moorland began, some few fields away from the high road. At the back was the tiny garden where Senath coaxed some potatoes and beans from out the grudging earth; and two apple trees, in an ecstasy of contortion, supported the clothes-line from which the great golden sheets, white in the sun, bellied like sails, or enigmatic garments of faded pinks and blues proclaimed the fact that Senath "took in washing."

On the moor in front of the cottage stood nineteen stones, breast-high, set in a huge circle. Within this circle the grass, for some reason, was a more vivid green than on the rest of the moor, and against it the stones on the nearer curve showed a pale grey, while the further ones stood up dark against the sky, for beyond them the moor sloped slightly to the cliffs and the sea.

These stones were known as the "Nineteen Merry Maidens," and legend had it that once they were living, breathing girls, who had come up to that deserted spot to dance upon a Sunday. As they twirled this way and that in their sinful gyrations the doom of petrification descended on them, as it did on the merry-makers of old when Perseus dangled the Gorgon's head aloft. So the nineteen maidens stand to this day, a huge fairy-ring of stone, like those smaller ones of fragile fungi that also enclose a circle of greener grass in

WHY SENATH MARRIED

the radius of their stems. Two luckless men, whom the maidens had beguiled to pipe for them, turned and fled, but they, too, were overtaken by judgment in a field further on along the road, and stand there to this day, a warning against the profanation of the Sabbath.

When Senath was asked why she had taken such a lonely cottage, she replied that it was on account of the Merry Maidens—they were such company for her. Often, of an evening, she would wander round the circle, talking aloud after the fashion of those who live alone. She had given each of the stones a name, and every one of them seemed, to her starved fancy, to have a personality of its own. Senath Lear, what with the mixed strains of blood that were her Cornish heritage, and the added influence of isolation, was fast becoming an old maid, and a wisht one at that, when something happened which set the forces of development moving in another direction. Senath herself connected it with her first visit to the Pipers, whom hitherto, on account of their sex, she had neglected for the Merry Maidens.

One market day—Thursday—Senath set off to a neighbouring farm to buy herself a little bit of butter. The way there, along the high road, lay past the field where the Pipers stood in their perpetual penance, and Senath could see them sticking up gaunt against the luminous sky for some time before she came up with them. For, as was only fitting, the Pipers were much taller than the Maidens, being, indeed, some twelve feet high.

Senath walked briskly along, a sturdy, full-chested figure, making, in her black clothes (Sunday-best, "come down"), the only dark note in the pale colours of early spring that held land and air. The young grass showed tender, the intricate webs made by the twisted twigs of the bare thorn-trees gleamed silvery. On the pale lopped branches of the elders, the first crumpled leaves were just beginning to unfold. The long grass in an orchard shone with the drifted

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

stars of thousands of narcissi, which a faint breeze woke to a tremulous twinkling. The road was thick with velvety white dust, for it was some time since rain had fallen, and the black of Senath's skirt was soon powdered into greyness. As she went, she wondered what it was that gave the air such a tang of summer, until she suddenly realized it was the subtle but unmistakable smell of the dust that brought to her mind long, sunny days, when such a smell was as much part of the atmosphere as the foliage or the heat. Now there was still a chill in the air, but she hardly felt it in the force of that suggestiveness.

"Sim' me I'm naught but a bit of stone like they Pipers," she said to herself, as she paused to look up at them, towering above her. Then a whimsical thought struck her. "I'll lave the Maidens be for a while and take my walk to the Pipers," she thought, "tes becoming enough in a woman o' my years, I should think."

She smiled at her mild jest and plodded on to the farm.

It was a fairly large house, with a roof still partly thatch, but mostly replaced by slate. In front of it, a trampled yard reached to the low wall of piled boulders and the road. Senath found the mistress of it leaning on the wall, ready to exchange a word with the occupants of the various market-carts as they drove homewards, and the business of the butter was soon transacted. Yet, for some odd reason, Senath was not anxious to take up her basket and go. Perhaps it was that touch of the unusual in the false hint of summer; perhaps, too, her decision to vary the course of her evening walk and the playmates of her imagination; but, whatever it was, she was vaguely aware of a prompting towards human contact. The two women sat on the low wall and chatted in a desultory fashion for a few minutes. Then the farmer's wife, shading her eyes with her hand, looked along the road.

"Your eyes are younger'n mine, Senath Lear," she said.

WHY SENATH MARRIED

"Tell me, edn that Sam'l Harvey of Upper Farm comen in his trap?"

Senath turned her clear, long-sighted eyes down the road and nodded.

"He'll be driving out Manuel Harvey to the Farm," Mrs. Cotton went on. "You do know, or maybe you don't, seein' you live so quiet, that since Sam's been a widow-man, Upper Farm's too big for he to live in in comfort. He's comin' to live in church-town and look after his interests in building. You do know that he's putting up a row of cottages to let to they artisesses. And Upper Farm he's let to Manuel Harvey."

"Is he any kin to en?" asked Senath, interested, as any woman would have been, in this budget of news about her old suitor.

"No, less they'm so far removed no one remembers et. There's a power of Harveys in this part of the world. Manuel do come from Truro way."

The high gig had been coming quickly nearer, and now drew up before the two women.

"Evenen, Mis' Cotton. Evenen, Senath," said Sam, with undisturbed phlegm. "Could'ee blige we weth some stout twine? The off-rein has broken and us have only put en together for the moment wi' a bit o' string Mr. Harvey here had in's pocket."

Mrs. Cotton bustled off into the house, and Sam climbed down, the gig bounding upwards when relieved from his weight. He was a big, fair man, his moustache distinctly lighter than his weather-beaten face, and since the days when he had courted Senath the whites of his eyes had become yellowish round the muddy hazel of the iris. Senath looked from him to Manuel, still in the gig, and as she did so, something unknown stirred at her pulses, very faintly.

Manuel Harvey was dark, and though his eyes, too, were hazel, it was that clear green-grey, thickly rimmed with

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

black, that is to be seen in the people of that part of the world who have a strain of Spanish blood in them, dating from the wrecks of the Armada. Those eyes, beneath their straight brows, met Senath's, and in that moment idle curiosity passed into something else.

Many women and most men marry for a variety of reasons not unconnected with externals. There has been much spoken and written on the subject of "affinities," a term at the best insecure and often pernicious, but very occasionally, when the two people concerned are elemental creatures with little perception of those half-shades which are the bane of civilisation, there does occur a flashing recognition which defies known laws of liking, and this it was which came to Manuel and Senath now.

"Falling in love" is ordinarily a complex, many-sided thing, compact of doubts and hesitations, fluctuating with the mood and with that powerful factor, the opinions of others. It is subject to influence by trivialities, varying affections and criticisms, and the surface of it is an elastic tissue setting this way and that, as thoughts ebb and flow from moment to moment, even though far beneath it may remain unperturbed. Yet every now and then come together two of that vanishing race who are capable of feeling an emotion in the round—the whole sphere of it. This sense of a spherical emotion came to Senath as she would have pictured the onslaught of a thunder-ball, save that this fire had the quality of warming without scorching utterly.

Looking up, as she stood there stricken motionless, she saw him transfigured to a glowing lambency by the blaze of the setting sun full on his face; and he, staring down, saw her against it. Her linen sunbonnet, which had slipped back on her shoulders and was only held by the strings beneath her chin, was brimming with sunlight, like some magic pilgrim's pack; and her eyes, opened widely in her worn, delicately seamed face, gained in blueness from the shadow

WHY SENATH MARRIED

her face and neck made against the brightness. Even so, to most people she would have appeared only a wholesome-looking woman in early middle life, who had kept the clear and candid gaze of childhood; a woman rather ungainly and thickset. Manuel saw her as what, for him, she was—a deep-bosomed creature, cool of head and warm of heart—a woman worth many times over the flimsy girls who would pass her with a pitying toss of the head. Manuel thought none of this consciously; he was only aware of a pricking feeling of interest and attraction, and had he been asked his opinion would have said she seemed a fine, up-standing woman enough. Then, when Mrs. Cotton came out again with the twine and a big packing-needle, he, too, climbed down and, his fingers being younger and more supple than Sam's, attended to the stitching of the rein.

"Must be gwain on, I b'lieve," announced Sam, when this was in progress. "Can't us giv'ee a lift, Senath? I'm sure us won't mind sitten familiar if you don't, will us, Manuel, my dear?"

"Why, no, thank'ee, Sam," said Senath quickly, "I do rare and like a bit of a walk before goin' to the bed. Evenen to you, and thank you, Sam. Evenen, Mr. Harvey."

He raised a face into which the blood had come with stooping over the rein.

"Evenen, Miss Lear," he muttered.

She started down the road at a good pace so as to have turned off before they came up with her, but she heard the clipclop of the horse's hoofs as she drew alongside with the Pipers, and she turned in towards them through a gap in the hedge. She pushed a way among bracken and clinging brambles, and as she reached them the sun slipped behind the S. Just hills, and in the glamorous mingling of the after-glow with the swift dusk she stood, as the gig, the two men in it apparently borne along level with the top of the hedge by some mysterious agency, passed by.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

For a while she stood there, the dew gathering on stone and twig and leaf. She glanced up at the two dark columns reared above, her hand against the rough surface of the nearer one.

"Must give en names, too," she said, with a backward thought for her Merry Maidens. "Why shoulden I call they after Sam and his new tenant? That one can be Sam,"—looking at the stumpier and wider of the two, "and the tall one, he can be Manuel."

.

There is little to tell of the love of Senath and Manuel save that it was swift, unspeakably dear, and put beyond the possibility of fulfilment by the death of the man. The slight accident of a rusty nail that ran into his foot, enhanced by the lack of cleanliness of the true peasant, and Manuel, for such a trifling cause, ceased to be. They were fated lovers; fated, having met, to love, and, so Senath told herself in the first hours of her bitterness, fated never to grasp their joy. The time had been so short, as far as mere weeks went, so infinitely long in that they had it for ever. After the funeral in the moorland churchyard, Senath went into her cottage and was seen of no one for many days. Then she reappeared, and to the scandal of the world it was seen that she had discarded her black. She went about her work silently as ever, but seemed to shun meeting her fellow-creatures less than formerly. A bare year after Manuel's death she had married Samuel Harvey.

No one wondered more than Sam himself how this had come about. If the marriage had been a matter of several months earlier, the common and obvious interpretation as to its necessity would have been current everywhere, and Sam would have had his meed of half-contemptuous pity. As it was, no one knew better than Sam that the other Harvey's wooing had gone no further than that wonderful kiss to

WHY SENATH MARRIED

which middle-aged people, who have missed the thing in their youth, can bring more reverential shyness than any blushing youth or girl.

Had it been any other than Senath, folk would not have been so surprised. A woman may get along very well single all her days if she has never been awakened to another way of life, but give her a taste of it and it is likely to become a thing that she must have. Yet few made the mistake of thinking that that was how it was with Senath. A strongly spiritual nature leaves its impress on even the most clayey of those with whom it comes in contact, and all knew Senath to be not quite as they were. Yet she married the red-necked Samuel Harvey, and they went to live together at the Upper Farm. And, as to any superior delicacy, Senath showed less than most. A few kind souls there were who thought, with the instinctive tact of the sensitive Celt, that it might hurt her to hear the name "Mrs. Harvey," which would have been hers had she married Manuel. On the contrary, just as though she were some young bride, elated at her position, she asked that even old friends should call her by the new title.

Sam was genuinely fond of Senath, and mingled with his fondness was a certain pride at having won what he had set out to win so many years ago; yet, it was so many years that he had been in a fair way to forget all about it till, one evening, he met Senath as he was driving home from market, much as when he had been with Manuel a year before. It had struck him as odd, for Senath was not apt to be upon the highway at that time, and although she was going in an opposite direction she asked for a lift back in his gig. When they came to the track that led off to her cottage, he tied up the mare and went with her to advise her as to her apple-trees, which were suffering from blight, and by the time he left, half an hour later, they were promised to each other. How it came about, Sam never quite understood; the only

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

thing he was sure about was that it had been entirely his doing. Yet he couldn't help wondering a bit, though it all seemed to follow on so naturally at the time, that it was not until he was on his way back to the Upper Farm that he felt puzzled. He was still wondering about it, and her, when the parson joined their hands in the bleak, cold church, and Senath stood, beneath her unbecoming daisied hat, looking as bleak and cold as the granite walls around her.

Later, Sam found this to be a misleading impression. Never was bride more responsive, in the eager passive fashion of shut eyes and quiet, still mouth, than was Senath. Only now and again, in the first weeks of their life together, she would give a start, and a look of terror and blank amazement would leap across her face, as though she were suddenly awakened out of a trance.

Men of Sam's condition and habit of mind do not, by some merciful law of nature, make ardent lovers, and life soon settled down comfortably enough on the farm. Senath was a capable housewife, and, what with the dairy-work and cooking and superintending the washing, and such extra work as looking after any sickly lamb or calf, she had plenty to do. And yet, in the midst of so much activity, every now and then Sam was struck by a queer little feeling of aloofness in Senath—not any withdrawing physically, but a feeling as though her mind were elsewhere. He might find her sitting on the settle with her eyes closed, although she was obviously awake, and an expression of half-fearful joy on her face, as on that of a person who is listening to some lovely sound and holding his breath for fear lest the least noise on his own part should frighten it into stillness.

However, Sam was not an imaginative man, and since the house shone with cleanliness such as it had never known, the shining not of mere scouring, but of the fine gloss only attained by loving care, he did not trouble his head. Women were queer at the best of times, and besides, a few months

WHY SENATH MARRIED

after the marriage, reason for any additional queerness on the part of Senath became known to him. After she had told him the news, Sam, ever inarticulate, but moved to the rarely felt depths of his nature, went out into a field that was getting its autumn ploughing, and his heart sang as he guided the horses down the furrow. Even as he was doing now, and his father had done before him, so should his son do after him, and the rich earth would turn over in just this lengthening wave at the blade of the ploughshare for future generations of Harveys yet to come. Like most men with any feeling for the land in them, Sam was sure his child must be a son.

And to him, who had not hoped for such a thing in marrying Senath, to him this glory was coming. Everything seemed to him wonderful that day; the pearly pallor of the dappled sky; the rooks and screaming gulls that wheeled and dipped behind his plough; the bare swaying elms, where the rooks' nests clung like gigantic burrs. Dimly, and yet for him keenly, he was aware of all these things, as a part of a great phenomenon in which he held pride of place.

When he came in, his way led through the yard, where a new farm-cart, just come home, stood under the shed in all the bravery of its blue body and vermilion wheels. Senath had crept round in the shed to the back and was studying the tailboard, one hand against it.

"Looken to see all's well to the rear as to the front?" called Sam jovially. "That's a proper farmer's wife."

Senath started violently and dropped her hand, looking away before she did so. "It looks fine," was all she said, and went within doors, passing him. A small portent, so slight Sam did not even know it for what it was, and yet something in her look and manner seemed to chill him to the bones of him. Then, and after, he put anything unfathomable in her ways down to her condition, and so turned what might have been a source of discomfort to the account of his joy.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

The blossom was thick upon the apple-trees when Senath's boy was born. He had a long fight of entry, and when the sky was paling and flushing with the reluctant dawn, Sam, who had spent the night alternately snoring on the settle and creeping upstairs in his stockinged-feet, heard the first wailing of his son. He heard, too, the clank of the milk-pails in the yard without, the lowing of an impatient cow, and the crowing—above all sounds the most melancholy to anyone upon a sleepless pillow—of a triumphant cock. As he heard all these common noises about his own place, he realised how much more dear they had all become to him by reason of what was in the room above. He knew that his wife had what is inadequately called a "bad time," but although the boards over his head had creaked for hours to the anxious tread of doctor and of nurse, not a cry had come until this one that heart and ear told him was from his child. He went upstairs once more, creeping less this time, and knocked timidly at the door, then coughed to show who it was. The nurse, a thin, yellow-haired London woman doing parish-nursing for her health—a woman he hated while he feared her—opened the door a slit and looked unsympathetically at him.

"I was wanten to knaw . . ." began Sam.

"None the better for hearing you," snapped the nurse. "She must have absolute quiet."

"I dedn't go for to mane that," explained Sam naïvely, "but the cheild? 'Tes a boy?"

"Oh, it's a boy, and doing all right," said the nurse, and shut the door in his face.

Sam went downstairs and put his head under the yard-pump, and laved his bare red arms in its flow, as men might bathe in the waters of perpetual youth. The great rejuvenation of a new birth had come upon him. For that is what it resolved itself into—the advent of a son to a middle-aged man. Sam felt his term of life taking immortal lease.

WHY SENATH MARRIED

Later in the day, the news that his son was weakly was broken to him, but made very little impression. The child could not die, because it was his. To other men, the common lot of humanity, but not so near home.

The morning was at its height; all around romance and mystery had dissolved in the broad shining, when they told Sam his wife wished to see him, but that he must be careful not to excite her as she was not yet beyond the danger-point.

When he saw her, the burning colour in her face strong against the white of her pillows, he thought they must be exaggerating, and he patted her hand cheerfully.

"You've done fine, Senath, lass," he assured her. "'Tis a brave an' handsome chap, is young Samuel."

"Not Samuel," answered Senath. Her voice, though low, was composed.

"What then?" asked Sam, remembering his wife was at a time when she must be humoured as far as speech went, anyway.

"Manuel," said Senath. Then, at his start of dissent: "Yes, Manuel."

"You'm my wife, not his," said Sam. "The cheild's my cheild, not his, and et shall be called for ets father."

"I'm Manuel's wife," said Senath, "and et's Manuel's cheild."

Sam calmed down, for he was now sure that his wife was light-headed. It was a common symptom, he had been told.

"No," said Senath, answering his thought, "I'm not that wisht, Sam. I'm in my right mind, and I'm only waiten on you to go. I'm waiten to go, Sam, I'm waiten to go."

"What do you mean, lass?"

"I'm waiten till I've told 'ee why I wedded you, Sam. It was because of Manuel."

She lay still a moment and then went on:

"Of course I had et in my thoughts to die a maid and to go to him as he left me. A woman allus thinks that to

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

begin with. And then et began to come clear to me—all the future. How I'd go on getting older and more withered and wi' nawthen to show for my life. And when I saw Manuel agan, he'd say: 'Where's the woman I loved? Where's her blue eyes, and the fine breast of her?' And I'd have to say: 'Wasted, gone, dried-up, Manuel.' I wanted him. I wanted Manuel as I never thought a woman could want anything but peace, and he was taken from me. So I determined in my heart I'd go to Manuel, and go with somethen to take to en. I married you, Sam, because you had the same name, and was the same height, and when I shut my eyes, I could fancy my head was on his breast, and that et was his heart beaten at my ear. That's why I made folk call me 'Mrs. Harvey': so I could force myself to think et was Manuel Harvey's wife I was. That's why I used to look at your name painted up, ef et was but on the tailboard of a cart. I used to hide the front of et, so that I could pictur' 'Manuel' written under my hand. Sometimes I'd pictur' et so hard and fierce that when I took my hand away, I expected to see et there, and the sight of 'Samuel' was like a blow. I got to know that, and to look away before I took my hand off."

Again she stopped and lay awhile as though gathering energy; then the indomitable voice went on:

"At first, when you took me in your arms, et was near to turning me mad, and I thought I couldn't go on wi' et; but I got better and better at imagining et was Manuel, though et was like to kill me every time I woke up. For et was like waking up every time I had to let the strain of my imagining go for a moment. And each time et left me feelen weaker and more kind of wisht than before. But I was glad of that, for et all brought me nearer. When you wedded me, I swear I'd got so I made et Manuel, and not you, who was holding me, and for nine months I've borne his child beneath my broken heart. I've made et his."

WHY SENATH MARRIED

She drew the little sentient bundle nearer to her as though to defend it from him. He stared at her, then spoke slackly, trying to urge force into his voice. "'Tes all nawthen but in your mind, all that. It's what's real as matters."

"Don't you remember, Sam, how the wise woman to church-town had a spite against Will Jacka's Maggie, and told her her cheild was goin' to be an idiot; and how et preyed on the mind of her, and the boy has no mouth-speech in him to this day? That was only in her mind. And how, in the Book, Jacob put the peeled wands before the eyes of the sheep, and the lambs came all ring-straked and speckled? I've put the thought of this before the eye of my mind; I've thought et into bein' Manuel's cheild, even as I belong to him and him only. And 'tes to him I'm taken et."

Sam turned, and stumbled from the room, down to the kitchen, and dropped upon the settle. The next moment, a sudden flash of fear sent him to his feet. He tore up the stairs, knocked into the nurse as she came out of her room, and swept her along with him.

Senath had her shawl folded thickly over the baby's face, and she had turned over so that her body lay upon it as she clasped it to her breast. But the baby still lived, and when they had taken it from her, she fell into a sullen silence, through which the tide of her life, too, began to creep back steadily.

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Ten years later, three little boys were playing in the yard at the Upper Farm. One was a few years older than the other two, who were obviously twins, fair and round and apple-cheeked, with bright brown eyes like little animals, and slackly open mouths. The other boy was of nervous make, with black hair that fell into eyes at once more human and more forlorn. He was very dirty, but he had stuck a yellow jonquil through a hole in his jersey. They were playing

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

at moulding little men out of the mud, and setting them about an inverted flower-pot which did duty for a house. Suddenly one of the little boys pushed away the mud-farmer which the eldest had placed at the arched break in the rim, which was the house door, and stuck his own much more primitive effort there instead.

"You'm not to put your man there, Manuel," he screamed. "That's the door like where father do stand of a Sunday. My man must stand there, because every one do say you'm a changeling and no proper son at all."

Manuel scrambled to his feet and ran across the yard; his hard little boots clattered as he went. He ran into the kitchen, where his mother, stout and comfortable-looking, was baking. The dim room was filled with the good smell of hot bread and pastry.

"Mother, mother," sobbed Manuel, "Sam's said et again. He says I'm not like da's son; that I'm naught but a changeling."

Senath raised a flushed face from her work and kept the rolling pin still a moment while her eldest-born spoke but she did it mechanically.

"If you'd only try not to be so odd-like and so different to the rest o' the family," she complained, "the boys would'n say it so often. There, take this hot split and lave me be."

At ten years old, neither wounded pride nor the worse hurt of always feeling a something unexplained about himself that did not fit in with his surroundings, was proof against hot pastry, and Manuel went away with it, though slowly, to a spot he knew beside the mill-lead. There a robin was building her nest in the alders, and there, too, if he lay still, with shut eyes, he could imagine all sorts of wonderful things that the brook was saying. How he was really not the son of these people at all, but of some wonderful prince, who would come upon a coal-black charger,

WHY SENATH MARRIED

like the one in the old fairy-book, and take him away, away from this discordant house where he felt such a very lonely little boy. . . .

In the kitchen, Senath, about to resume her work, saw that the jonquil had dropped from his jersey to the floor, where it lay shining, a fallen star. Senath stood staring at it for a minute. For one flash, bewildering and disconcerting, like the sudden intrusion of last night's dream into the affairs of to-day, she saw herself again—that self she never thought of as being the precursor of the present Senath, but as a totally different person altogether, whom, try as she would, she could not connect up. She had long ago given up trying, busy with her man and the boys. The two younger were little trouble enough beyond the ordinary vexatiousness of childhood, but there was something about Manuel which was different, and which often annoyed Sam, who liked to brag about his eldest boy, and tried always to make him out as exactly like himself. But she was conscious that the Senath of long ago would have understood. Now, as she stared at the jonquil, it seemed to her that that Senath was she herself again, though she had grown to despise the dreaming, fanciful creature of her muffled memory—perhaps there had been something fierce and great about her, that the present Senath could never capture again.

The moment passed, and she let the flower lie where it was, and presently, when Sam, the successful husband, came in ruddy and clamorous for his tea, his heavy boot trampled it, all discoloured, into a crack of the stone flags. The little boys came tumbling in, too, also clamorous, after the way of men-folk.

"Where's Manuel?" demanded Sam.

Both little shrill voices were obsequious with information that he had gone towards the leat.

"Day-dreamen, I'll be bound," said Sam, his mouth full

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

of hot split. "Eh, well, so were you, missus, at one time of day. Life'll soon knock et out of him, like et has of you. And you'm all the better wi'out et, arn't 'ee, lass?"

She said "Yes," and would have thought so if it had not been for the memory of that moment, already faded, when she had seen the jonquil. As it was, she sent a quick thought out to the boy who lay playing with imaginings by the alders; a thought of vague regret and a faint hope that it might not be with him quite as it had been with her. And whether the thought reached his unknowing self or not, to Manuel's fancy the leat had a finer tale and brighter hopes to tell him that evening than usual, and he was at the age, when, although he knew the corresponding fall on entering the house must be the more severe, he never doubted that the dreams were worth it.

THE CONNOISSEUR

By PERCEVAL GIBBON

THE office of the machine-tool agency, where Mr. Baruch sat bowed and intent over his desk, was still as a chapel upon that afternoon of early autumn; the pale South Russian sun, shining full upon its windows, did no more than touch with colour the sober shadows of the place. From the single room of the American Vice-consulate, across the narrow staircase-landing without, there came to Mr. Baruch the hum of indistinguishable voices that touched his consciousness without troubling it. Then suddenly, with a swell-organ effect, as though a door had been flung open between him and the speakers, he heard a single voice that babbled and faltered in noisy, shrill anger.

“Out o’ this—out o’ this!” It was the unmistakable voice of Selby, the Vice-consul, whose routine day was incomplete without a quarrel. “Call yourself an American—you! Comin’ in here——”

The voice ceased abruptly. Mr. Baruch at his desk moved slightly like one who disposes of a trivial interruption and bent again to the matter before him. Between his large white hands, each decorated with a single ring, he held a small oblong box, the size of a cigar-case, of that blue lacquer of which Russian craftsmen once alone possessed the secret. Battered now by base uses, tarnished and abraded here and there, it preserved yet, for such eyes as Mr. Baruch’s, clues to its ancient-like delicacy of surface and the glory of its sky-rivalling blue. He had found it an hour before upon a tobacconist’s counter, containing matches, and had bought

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

it for a few kopecks; and now alone in his office, amid his catalogues of lathes and punches, he was poring over it, reading it as another man might read poetry, inhaling from it all that the artist, its maker, had breathed into it.

There was a telephone at work in the Vice-consulate now—a voice speaking in staccato bursts, pausing between each for the answer. Mr. Baruch sighed gently, lifting the box for the light to slide on its surface. He was a large man, nearing his fiftieth year, and a quiet self-security, a quality of being at home in the world, was the chief of his effects. Upon the wide spaces of his face the little and neat features were grouped concisely—a nose boldly curved, but small and well-modelled, a mouth at once sensuous and fastidious, and eyes steadfast and benign. A dozen races between the Caspian and the Vistula had fused to produce this machine-tool agent; and over the union of them there was spread, like a preservative varnish, the smoothness of an imperturbable placidity.

Footsteps crossed the landing and there was a loud knock on his door. Before Mr. Baruch, deliberate always, could reply, it was pushed open, and Selby, the Vice-consul, his hair awry, his glasses askew on the high, thin bridge of his nose, and with all his general air of a maddened bird, stood upon the threshold.

“Ah, Selby; it is you, my friend!” remarked Mr. Baruch pleasantly. “And you wish to see me—yes?”

Selby advanced into the room, saving his glasses by a sudden clutch.

“Say, Baruch,” he shrilled, “here’s a hell of a thing! This place gets worse every day. Feller comes into my office—kind of a pedlar, selling rugs and carpets, and shows a sort of passport. Armenian, I guess, or a Persian or something; and when I tell him to clear out, damned if he doesn’t go and throw a kind of a fit right on my floor.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Baruch sympathetically. “A fit—yes?”

THE CONNOISSEUR

You have telephoned for the *Gorodski Pomosh*—the town ambulance?"

"Yes," said Selby—"at least, I had Miss Pilgrim do that—my clerk, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Baruch, "I know Miss Pilgrim. Well, I will come and see your pedlar-man." He rose. "But first—see what I have been buying for myself, Selby."

He held out the little battered box upon his large firm palm. "You like it? I gave forty kopecks for it to a man who would have taken twenty. It is nice—yes?"

Selby gazed at it vaguely. "Very nice," he said perfunctorily. "I used to buy 'em too when I came here first."

Mr. Baruch smiled that quiet, friendly smile of his and put the box carefully into a drawer of his desk.

The American Vice-consulate at Nikolaieff was housed in a single great room lighted by a large window at one end, overlooking the port and the wharves; so that, entering from the gloom of the little landing one looked along the length of it as towards the mouth of a cave. Desks, tables, a copying press, and a typewriter were all its gear; it was a place as aridly specialised for its purpose as an iron-foundry; but now, for the moment, it was redeemed from its everyday barrenness by the two figures upon the floor near the entrance.

The pedlar lay at full length, a bundle of strange travel-wrecked clothes, suggesting a lay-figure in his limp alertness and the loose sprawl of his limbs. Beside him on the boards, trim in white shirt-waist and tweed skirt, kneeled the Vice-consul's clerk, Miss Pilgrim; she had one arm under the man's head and with the other was drawing towards her his fallen bundle of rugs to serve as a pillow. As she bent, her gentle face, luminously fair, was over the swart clenched countenance of the unconscious man, whose stagnant eyes seemed set on her in an unwinking stare.

Mr. Baruch bent to help her place the bundle in position.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

She lifted her face to him in recognition. Selby, fretting to and fro, snorted.

"Damned if I'd have touched him," he said. "Most likely he never saw soap in his life. A hobo, that's what he is—just a hobo."

Miss Pilgrim gave a deprecating smile and stood up. She was a slight girl, serious and gentle, and half her waking life was spent in counteracting the effects of Selby's indigestion and ill-temper. Mr. Baruch was still stooping to the bundle of rugs.

"Oh, that'll be all right, Mr. Baruch," she assured him. "He's quite comfortable now."

Mr. Baruch, still stooping, looked up at her.

"I am seeing the kind of rugs he has," he answered. "I am interested in rugs. You do not know rugs—no?"

"No," replied Miss Pilgrim.

"Ah! This, now, is out of Persia, I think," said Mr. Baruch, edging one loose from the disordered bundle. "Think!" he said. "This poor fellow, lying here—he is Armenian. How many years has he walked, carrying his carpets and rugs, all the way down into Persia, selling and changing his goods in bazaars and caravanserais, and then back over the Caucasus and through the middle of the Don Cossacks—all across the Black Lands—carrying the rugs till he comes to throw his fit on Mr. Selby's floor! It is a strange way to live, Miss Pilgrim—yes?"

"Ye-es," breathed Miss Pilgrim, "ye-es."

He smiled at her. He had a corner of the rug unfolded now and draped over his bent knee. His hand stroked it delicately; the blank light from the window let its colouring show in its just values. Mr. Baruch, with the dregs of his smile yet curving his lips, scanned it without too much appearance of interest. He was known as a "collector," a man who gathered things that others disregarded, and both Miss Pilgrim and Selby watched him with the respect of the

THE CONNOISSEUR

laity for the initiate. But they could not discern nor share the mounting ecstasy of the connoisseur, of the spirit which is to the artist what the wife is to the husband, as he realised the truth and power of the colouring, its stained-glass glow, the justice and strength of the patterning, and the authentic silk-and-steel of the texture.

"Is it any good?" asked Selby suddenly. "I've heard of 'em being worth a lot sometimes, thousands of dollars!"

"Sometimes," agreed Mr. Baruch. "Those you can see in museums. This one, now, I would offer him twenty roubles for it, and I would give perhaps thirty if he bargained too hard. That is because I have a place for it in my house."

"And he'd probably make a hundred per cent. on it at that," said Selby. "These fellows——"

The loud feet of the ambulance men on the stairs interrupted him. Mr. Baruch, dragging the partly unfolded rug with him, moved away as the white-clad doctor and his retinue of stretcher-bearers came in at the door, with exactly the manner of the mere spectator who makes room for people more directly concerned. He saw the doctor kneel beside the prostrate man and Miss Pilgrim hand him one of the office tea-glasses; then, while all crowded round to watch the process of luring back the strayed soul of the pedlar, he had leisure to assure himself again of the quality of his find. The tea-glass clinked against clenched teeth. "A spoon, somebody!" snapped the doctor; the cramped throat gurgled painfully; but Mr. Baruch, slave to the delight of the eye, was unheeding. A joy akin to love, that pervaded and rejoiced his every faculty, had possession of him. The carpet was all he had deemed it—and more, the perfect expression on its medium of a fine and pure will to beauty.

The pedlar on the floor behind him groaned painfully and tatters of speech formed on his lips. "That's better," said the doctor encouragingly. Mr. Baruch dropped the rug and moved quietly towards the group.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

The man was conscious again; a stretcher-bearer, kneeling behind him, was holding him in a half-sitting posture; and Mr. Baruch watched with interest how the tide of returning intelligence mounted in the thin mask of his face. He was an Armenian by every evidence—an effect of weather-beaten pallor appearing through dense masses of coal-black beard and hair; one of those timid and servile offscourings of civilisation whose wandering lives are daily epics of horrid peril and adventure. His pale eyes roved here and there as he lay against the stretcher-bearer's knee.

"Well," said the doctor, rising and dusting his hands one against the other, "we won't need the stretcher. Two of you take him under the arms and help him up."

The burly Russian ambulance-men hoisted him easily enough and stood supporting him, while he hung between them weakly. Still his eyes wandered, seeking dumbly in the big room. The doctor turned to speak to the Vice-consul and Miss Pilgrim moved forward to the sick man.

"Yes?" she questioned in her uncertain Russian. "Yes? What is it?"

He made feeble sounds, but Mr. Baruch heard no shaped word. Miss Pilgrim, however, seemed to understand.

"Oh, your rugs!" she answered. "They're all here, quite safe." She pointed to the bundle, lying where it had been thrust aside. "Quite safe, you see!"

Mr. Baruch said no word. The silken carpet that he had removed was out of sight upon the farther side of the big central table of the office. The pedlar groaned again and murmured. Miss Pilgrim bent forward to give ear. Mr. Baruch, quietly and deliberately, as always, moved to join the conference of the doctor and Selby. He was making a third to their conversation when Miss Pilgrim turned.

"One more?" she was saying. "Is there one more? Mr. Baruch, did you—— Oh, there it is!"

THE CONNOISSEUR

She moved across to fetch it, the pedlar's eyes following her slavishly. Mr. Baruch smiled.

"Yes?" he said. "Oh, that carpet! He wants to sell it—yes?"

"He isn't fit to do any bargaining yet," replied Miss Pilgrim; and Mr. Baruch nodded agreeably.

The doctor and Selby finished their talk, and the former came back into the grouping. "Well, take him down to the ambulance," he bade the men. They moved to obey; but the sick man, mouthing strange sounds, seemed to try to hang back, making gestures with his head towards the disregarded bundle that was the whole of his earthly wealth.

"What's the matter with him?" cried the doctor impatiently. "Those rugs? Oh, we can't take a hotbed of microbes like that to the hospital! Move him along, there!"

"And I'm not going to have 'em here," barked Selby. The pedlar, limp between the big stretcher-bearers, moaned and seemed to shiver in a vain effort to free himself.

"Wait, please!" Miss Pilgrim came forward. She had been folding the silken rug of Mr. Baruch's choice and was now carrying it before her; it was as though she wore an apron of dawn-gold and sunset-red. The pitiful man rolled meek, imploring eyes upon her. She cast down the rug she carried upon the others in their bundle and stood over them.

"I will take care of them," she said. "They will be safe with me. Do you understand me? Me!" She touched herself upon her white-clad bosom with one hand, pointing with the other to the rugs.

The man gazed at her mournfully, resignedly. Martyrdom was the daily bread of his race; oppression had been his apprenticeship to life. It was in the order of things as he knew it that those who had power over him should plunder him; but facing the earnest girl, with her frank and kindly eyes, some glimmer of hope lit in his abjectness. He sighed and let his head fall forward in a feeble motion of

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

acquiescence; and the big men who held him took him out and down the stairs to the waiting ambulance.

"Well!" said Selby, as the door closed behind the doctor. "Who wouldn't sell a farm and be a consul? We ought to have the place disinfected. What do you reckon to do with that junk, Miss Pilgrim?"

Miss Pilgrim was readjusting the thong that had bound the rugs together. "Oh, I'll take them home in a droshky, Mr. Selby," she said. "I've got a cupboard in my rooms where they can stay till the poor man gets out of hospital."

"All right," snarled Selby. "It's your trouble." He turned away, but stopped upon a sudden thought. "What about letting Baruch take that rug now?" he asked. "He's offered a price, an' he can pay it to you."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Baruch. "I can pay the cash to Miss Pilgrim and she can pay it to the poor man. He will perhaps be glad to have some cash at once when he comes out."

Miss Pilgrim, kneeling beside the pack of rugs, looked doubtfully from one to the other. Mr. Baruch returned her gaze benignly; Selby, as always, had the affronted air of one who is prepared to be refused the most just and moderate demand. "Why," she began, hesitatingly, "I suppose——"

Then Selby had to strike in. "Aren't worrying because you said you'd look after the stuff yourself, are you?" he jeered.

Mr. Baruch's expression did not alter by so much as a twitch; there was no outward index of his impulse to smite the blundering man across the mouth.

The hesitancy upon Miss Pilgrim's face dissolved in an instant and she positively brightened.

"Of course," she said happily, "what can I have been thinking of? When the poor man comes out, Mr. Baruch can make his own bargain with him; but till then—I promised!"

THE CONNOISSEUR

Selby, with slipping glasses awry on his nose, gaped at her. "Promised!" he repeated. "That—that hobo——"

Mr. Baruch intervened. "But, Selby, my friend, Miss Pilgrim is quite right. She promised, and it is only two or three days to wait, and also it is not the only rug in the world. Though," he added generously, "it is a nice rug—yes?"

Miss Pilgrim smiled at him gratefully; Selby shrugged and just caught his glasses as the shrug shook them loose. "Fix it to suit yourselves," he snarled, and moved away towards his untidy desk by the window.

The pale autumn sun had dissolved in watery splendours as Mr. Baruch, with the wide astrachan collar of his overcoat turned up about his ears, walked easily homeward in the brisk evening chill. There were lights along the wharves, and the broad waters of the port, along which his road lay, were freckled with the spark-like lanterns on the ships, each with its little shimmer of radiance reflected from the stream. Commonly, as he strolled, he saw it all with gladness—the world and the fulness thereof were ministers of his pleasure; but upon this night he saw it absently, with eyes that dwelt beyond it all. Outwardly he was the usual Mr. Baruch; his slightly sluggish benevolence of demeanour was unchanged as he returned the salute of a policeman upon a corner; but inwardly he was like a man uplifted by good news. The sense of pure beauty, buried in his being, stirred like a rebellious slave; those arabesques, that colouring, that texture, thrilled him like a gospel.

It was in the same mood of abstraction that he let himself into his flat in the great German-built apartment-house that overlooked the boulevard and the thronged river. He laid aside his overcoat in the little hall, conventional with its waxed wood and its mirror, clicked an electric-light switch, and passed through a portière into the salon, which was the chief room of his abode—a large room, oblong and high-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

ceilinged, designed by a man with palace architecture—that obsession of the Russian architect—on the brain. He advanced into it, still with that vagueness of sense, and stopped, looking around him.

It was part of the effect which Mr. Baruch made upon those who came into contact with him that few suspected him of a home, a domesticity of his own; he was so complete, so compactly self-contained, without appanages of that kind. Here, however, was the frame of his real existence, which contained it as a frame contains a picture and threw it into relief. The great room, under the strong lights, showed the conventional desert of polished parquet floor, with sparse furniture grouped about it. There was an ivory-inlaid stand with a Benares brass tray; a Circassian bridal linen-chest stood against a wall; the tiles of the stove in the corner illustrated the life and martyrdom of Saint Tychon. Upon another wall was a trophy of old Cossack swords. Before the linen-chest there stood a trunk of the kind that every Russian housemaid takes with her to her employment—a thing of bent birchwood, fantastically painted in strong reds and blues. One buys such things for the price of a cocktail.

Mr. Baruch stood looking round him at the room. Everything in it was of his choosing, the trophy of some moment or some hour of delight. He had selected his own background.

“Ah—Samuel!”

He turned, deliberate always. Between the portières that screened the opposite doorway there stood the supreme “find” of his collection. Somewhere or other, between the processes of becoming an emperor in the machine-tool trade of Southern Russia and an American citizen, Mr. Baruch—so complete in himself, so perfect an entity—had added to himself a wife. The taste that manifested itself alike on battered blue lacquer and worn prayer-rugs from Persia had

THE CONNOISSEUR

not failed him then; he had found a thing perfect of its kind. From the uneasy Caucasus, where the harem-furnishers of Circassia jostle the woman merchants of Georgia, he had brought back a prize. The woman who stood in the doorway—one strong bare arm uplifted to hold back the stamped leather curtain—was large, a great white creature like a moving statue, with a still, blank face framed in banks of shining jet hair. The strong lights of the chamber shone on her; she stood, still as an image, with large incurious eyes looking at him. All the Orient was immanent in her; she had the quiet, the resignation, the un-hope of the odalisque.

“Samuel,” she said again.

“Ah, Adina!” And then, in the Circassian idiom, “Grace go before you!”

Her white arm sank and the curtains swelled together behind her. Mr. Baruch took the chief of his treasures into his arms and kissed her.

The room in which presently they dined was tiny like a *cabinet particulier*; they sat at food like lovers, with shutters closed upon the windows, to defend their privacy. Mr. Baruch ate largely, and his great wife watched him across the table with still satisfaction. The linen of the table had been woven by the nuns of the Lavra at Kieff; the soup bowls were from Cracow; there was nothing in the place that had not its quality and distinction. And Mr. Baruch fitted it as a snail fits its shell. It *was* his shell; for, like a snail, he had exuded it from his being and it was part of him.

“I saw a carpet to-day,” he said abruptly. There was Black Sea salmon on his plate and he spoke above a laden fork.

“Yes?” The big, quiet woman did not so much inquire as invite him to continue.

Mr. Baruch ate some salmon. “A carpet—yes!” he said presently. “Real—like diamonds—like you, Adina! No mistake!”

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

At the compliment, she lowered her head and raised it again, in a motion like a very slow nod. Mr. Baruch finished his salmon without further words.

"And——?" Upon her unfinished question he looked up.

"Yes," he said, "surely! in a few days I shall bring it home."

Her large eyes, the docile eyes of the slave-wife, acclaimed him. For her, there were no doubts, no judgments; the husband was the master, the god of the house. Mr. Baruch continued his meal to its end.

"And now," he said presently, when he had finished, "you will go to bed."

She stood up forthwith, revealing again her majestic stature and pose. Mr. Baruch sat at his end of the table with his tiny cup of coffee and his thimble-like glass before him. He lifted his eyes and gazed at her appreciatively, and for a moment there lit in his face, as it were, a reflection of what Selby and Miss Pilgrim might have seen in it, had they known how to look, when first he realised the silken glories of the carpet. The woman, returning his gaze, maintained her pale, submissive calm.

"Blessings upon you," he said, dismissing her.

She lowered her splendid head in instant obedience.

"Blessings," she replied, "and again blessings! Have sweet sleep, lord and husband!"

He sat above his coffee and his liqueur and watched her superb body pass forth from the little room. She did not turn to look back; they are not trained to coquetry, those chattel-women of the Caucasus. Mr. Baruch smiled while he let the sweetish and violently strong liqueur roll over his tongue and the assertively fragrant coffee possess his senses. His wife was a "find," a thing perfect of its sort, that satisfied his exigent taste; and now again he was to thrill with the joy of acquisition. There were rugs in the room where he sat—one draped over a settee, another hang-

THE CONNOISSEUR

ing upon the wall opposite him, one underfoot—each fine and singular in its manner. He passed an eye over them and then ceased to see them. His benevolent face with all its suggestive reserve and its quiet shrewdness fell vague with reverie; it was in absence of mind rather than in presence of appetite that he helped himself for the fourth time to the high-explosive liqueur from the old Vilna decanter; and there flushed into sight before him, the clearer for the spur with which the potent drink rowelled his consciousness, the vision of the silk carpet, its glow, as though fire were mixed with the dyes of it, the faultless rightness and art of its pattern, the soul-ensnaring perfection of the whole.

It was some hours later that he looked into his wife's room on his way to his own. She was asleep, her quiet head cushioned upon the waves of her hair. Mr. Baruch, half-burned cigar between his teeth, stood and gazed at her. Her face, wiped clean of its powder, was white as paper, with that death-like whiteness which counts as beauty in Circassia; only the shadows of her eyelids and the broad red of her lips stained her pallor. Across her breast the red-and-blue hem of the quilt lay like a scarf.

Mr. Baruch looked at the arrangement critically. He was a connoisseur in perfection and something was lacking. It eluded him for a moment or two and, then suddenly, like an inspiration, he perceived it. The rug—the thing delicate as silk, with its sheen, its flush of lines, with the white, slumbering face above it! The picture, the perfect thing—he saw it!

The woman in bed stirred and murmured.

"Blessings upon you," said Mr. Baruch, and smiled as he turned away.

"Bl-essings," she murmured sleepily, without opening her eyes, and sighed and lay still once more.

The heart of a man is a battle-ground, where might is always right and victory is always to the strongest of the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

warring passions. And even a saint's passion to holiness is scarcely stronger, more selfless, more disregarding of conditions and obstacles than the passion of the lover of the beautiful, the connoisseur, towards acquisition. In the days that followed Mr. Baruch, walking his quiet ways about the city, working in the stillness of his office, acquired the sense that the carpet, by the mere force of his desire, was somehow due to him—a thing only momentarily out of his hands, like one's brief loan to a friend. Presently it would come his way and be his; and it belongs to his sense of security in his right that not once, not even when he remembered it most avidly, did he think of the expedient of buying it from the sick pedlar by paying him the value of it. Another man would probably have gone forthwith to Selby, told him the secret, and enlisted his aid; but Mr. Baruch did not work like that. He allowed chance a week in which to show its reasonableness: and not till then, nothing having happened, did he furnish himself one afternoon with an excuse, in the form of a disputed customs charge, and cross the narrow landing to the American Vice-consulate.

Selby was there alone at his disorderly desk by the window, fussing feebly among the chaos of his tumbled papers and making a noise of desperation with his lips like a singing kettle.

"Ah, Selby, my friend!" Mr. Baruch went smilingly forward. "You work always too much. And now come I with a little other thing for you. It is too bad—yes?"

"Hullo, Baruch," returned Selby. "You're right about the workin'. Here I keep a girl to keep my papers in some kind of a sort of order, an' I been huntin' and diggin' for an hour to find one of 'em. It gets me what she thinks I pay her for! Hoboes an' that kind of trash—that's her style."

Mr. Baruch had still his agreeable, mild smile which was

THE CONNOISSEUR

as much a part of his daily wear as his trousers. He could not have steered the talk to better purpose.

"Hoboes?" he said vaguely. "Trash!"

Selby exploded in weak, sputtering fury, and as always his glasses canted on the high, thin bridge of his nose and waggled in time to each jerk of words.

"It's that dam' hobo—you saw him, Baruch!—that pranced in here and threw a fit and a lot of old carpets all over my floor. Armenian or some such kind of a nigger! Well, they took him to the hospital; an' this afternoon he hadn't got more sense than to send a message over here."

Mr. Baruch nodded. "Ah, to Miss Pilgrim—yes?—because of her very kind treatment."

Selby caught his glasses as they fell. "Huh!" he sneered malevolently. "You'd have to be a hobo before you'd get kindness from her. Hard luck stories is the only kind she believes. 'I'll have to go, Mr. Selby,' she says. And she goes—and here's me huntin' and pawin' around——"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Baruch, "it is inconvenient. So I will come back to-morrow with my matter, when you shall have more time. Then the poor man, he is worse—or better?"

"You don't suppose I been inquiren' after him, do you?" squealed Selby.

"No," replied Mr. Baruch equably, "I do not suppose that, Selby, my friend."

The street in which Miss Pilgrim had her rooms was one of the long gullies of high-fronted architecture running at right angles to the river, and thither—portly, handsomely overcoated, with the deliberateness of a balanced and ordered mind in every tread of his measured gait—went Mr. Baruch. He had no plan; his resource and personality would not fail him in an emergency; and it was time he brought them to bear. One thing he was sure of—he would take the carpet home that night.

At the head of two flights of iron-railed stone stairs he

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

reached the door of the flat which he sought. Two or three attempts upon the bell-push brought no response, and he could hear no sound of life through the door. He waited composedly; it did not enter his head that all the occupants might be out; and he was right, for presently, after he had thumped on the door with his gloved fist, there was a slip-slap of feet within and a sloven of a woman opened to him.

Mr. Baruch gave her his smile. "The English lady is in? I wish to speak to her."

The woman stood aside hastily to let him enter. "Say Gaspodin Baruch is here," he directed blandly.

It was a narrow corridor, flanked with doors, in which he stood. The woman knocked at the nearest of these, opened it, and spoke his name. Immediately from within he heard the glad, gentle voice of the Consul's clerk.

"Surely!" it answered the servant in Russian; then called in English: "Come in, Mr. Baruch, please!"

He removed his hat and entered. An unshaded electric light bulb filled the room with crude light, stripping its poverty and tawdriness naked to the eye—its bamboo furniture, its imitation parquet, and the cheap distemper of its walls. But of these Mr. Baruch was only faintly aware, for in the middle of the floor, with brown paper and string beside her, Miss Pilgrim knelt amid a kaleidoscope of tumbled rugs, and in her hands, half folded already, was *the* rug.

She was smiling up at him with her mild, serene face, while under her thin, pale hands lay the treasure.

"Now this is nice of you, Mr. Baruch," she was saying. "I suppose Mr. Selby told you I'd had to go out."

Mr. Baruch nodded. He had let his eyes rest on the rug for a space of seconds and then averted them.

"Yes," he said. "He said it was some message about the poor man who was ill, and I think he was angry."

"Angry?" Miss Pilgrim's smile faded. "I'm—I'm sorry for that."

THE CONNOISSEUR

"So," continued Mr. Baruch, "as I have to go by this way, I think I will call to see if I can help. It was some paper Mr. Selby cannot find, I think."

"Some paper?" Miss Pilgrim pondered. "You don't know which it was?" Mr. Baruch shook his head regretfully. Between them, the rug lay and glowed up at him.

"You see," continued Miss Pilgrim, "it's this way, Mr. Baruch. That poor man in hospital doesn't seem to be getting any better yet, and he's evidently fretting about his rugs. They're probably all he's got in the world. So this afternoon they telephoned up from the hospital to say he wanted me to send one down in particular—the thinnest one of them all. That's this one!"

She showed it to him, her fingers feeling its edge. There was wonder in his mind that the mere contact of it did not tell her of its worth.

"I'm afraid it's the one you wanted to buy," she said—"the one you said was worth thirty roubles. Well, of course, it's his, and since he wanted it I had to get it for him. I couldn't do anything else, could I, Mr. Baruch?"

Mr. Baruch agreed. "It is very kind treatment," he approved. "So now you pack it in a parcel and take it to the hospital before you go back to find Mr. Selby's paper—yes? Mr. Selby will be glad."

A pucker of worry appeared between the girl's frank brows, and she fell swiftly to folding and packing the rug.

"If—if only he hasn't left the office before I get there!" she doubted.

Mr. Baruch picked up the string and prepared to assist with the packing.

"Perhaps he will not be gone," he said consolingly. "He was so angry, I think the paper would be important, and he would stay to find it—yes?" Miss Pilgrim did not seem cheered by this supposition. "Well," said Mr. Baruch, then, "if it should be a help to you and the poor man, I can take

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

this parcel for you and leave it in the gate of the hospital when I go past this evening."

He had a momentary tremor as he made the proposal, but it was not doubt that it would be accepted nor fear lest his purpose should show through it. He felt neither of these; it was the thrill of victory that he had to keep out of his tone and his smile.

For it was victory. Miss Pilgrim beamed at him thankfully.

"Oh, Mr. Baruch, you *are* kind!" she cried. "I didn't like to ask you, but you must be a thought-reader. If you'd just hand it in for Dr. Semianoff, he'll know all about it and I can get back to Mr. Selby at once. And thank you ever so much, Mr. Baruch!"

"But," protested Mr. Baruch, "it is a little thing—it is nothing. And it is much pleasure to me to do this for you and the poor man. To-night he will have it, and to-morrow perhaps he will be better."

They went down the stairs together and bade each other a friendly good night in the gateway.

"And I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Baruch," said Miss Pilgrim again, her pale face shining in the dusk.

Mr. Baruch put a fatherly hand on her sleeve. "Hush! you must not say it," he said. "It is I that am happy."

Half an hour later he found what he sought in a large furniture-store on the Pushkinskaya—an imitation Persian rug, manufactured at Frankfurt, and priced at seventeen roubles. With a little bargaining—the salesman was no match for Mr. Baruch at that—he got it for fifteen and a half. He himself directed the packing of it, to see that no store-label was included in the parcel; and a quarter of an hour later he delivered it by cab to the *dvoruck* at the hospital-gate for Dr. Semianoff. Then he drove homewards; he could not spare the time to walk while the bundle he held in his arms was yet unopened and its treasure housed in his home.

THE CONNOISSEUR

His stratagem was perfect. Even if the Armenian were to make an outcry, who would lend him an ear? It would appear—it could easily be made to appear—that he was endeavouring to extort money from Miss Pilgrim upon a flimsy pretext that a worthless rug had been substituted for a valuable one, and the police would know how to deal with him. Mr. Baruch put the matter behind him contentedly.

The majestic woman in his home watched him impassively as he unpacked his parcel and spread the rug loosely across a couple of chairs in the salon. In actual words he said only: "This the carpet, Adina,—for your bed. Look at it well!" She looked obediently, glancing from it to his face, her own still with its unchanging calm, and wondered dully in her sex-specialised brain at the light of rapture in his countenance. He pored upon it, devouring its rareness of beauty, the sum and the detail of its perfection, with a joy as pure, an appreciation as generous, as if he had not stolen it from under the hands of a sick pauper and a good Samaritan.

Mr. Baruch was happy.

That night he stood at the door of his wife's room. "Blessings upon you," he said, and smiled at her in acknowledgment of the blessings she returned. A brass-and-glass lantern contained the electric light in the chamber; it shone softly on all the apparatus of toilet and slumber, and upon the picture that was Mr. Baruch's chief work of art—the marble-white face thrown into high relief by the unbound black hair and the colours, like a tangle of softened and subdued rainbows, that flowed from her bosom to the foot of the bed. He crossed the floor and bent and kissed her where she lay.

"Wonderful," he said to her. "You are a question, an eternal question. And here"—his hand moved on the surface of the rug like a caress—"is the answer to you. Two perfect things—two perfect things!"

"Blessings!" she murmured.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"I have them," he said. "Two of them," and laughed and left her.

He did not see Miss Pilgrim the following day nor the next; that was easy for him to contrive, for much of his business was done outside his office. It was not that he had any fear of meeting her; but it was more agreeable to his feelings not to be reminded by the sight of her of her part in the acquisition of the carpet. Upon the third day he was late in arriving, for his wife had complained at breakfast of headache and sickness, and he had stayed to comfort her and see her back to bed for a twenty-four hours' holiday from life. On his way he had stopped at a florist to send her back some flowers.

He was barely seated at his desk when there was a knock upon his door and Miss Pilgrim entered.

He smiled his usual pleasant welcome at her.

"Ah, Miss Pilgrim, good morning: I am glad to see you. You will sit down—yes?"

He was rising to give her a chair; he was not in the least afraid of her; when something about her arrested him, a trouble, a note of sorrow.

"Mr. Baruch," she began.

He knew the value of the deft interruption that breaks the thread of thought. "There is something not right?" he suggested. "I hope not." With a manner of sudden concern he added, "The poor man, he is worse—no?"

Miss Pilgrim showed him a stricken face and eyes a-brim with tears. "He's—he's dead!" she quavered.

"See, now!" said Mr. Baruch, shocked. "What a sad thing—and after all your kind treatment. I am sorry, Miss Pilgrim; but it is to remember that the poor man has come here through much hardship—yes? And at the least, you have given him back his rug to comfort him."

"But——" Miss Pilgrim stayed his drift of easy, grave speech with a sort of cry. "That's the cause of all the

THE CONNOISSEUR

trouble and danger—and you only did it to help me. You must come with me to the Town Clinic at once. Mr. Selby's gone already. There'll be no danger if you come at once."

"Danger?" repeated Mr. Baruch. "I have not understood." But though in all truth he did not understand, a foreboding of knowledge was chill upon him. He cleared his throat. "What did he die of?"

Miss Pilgrim's tears had overflowed. She had a difficulty in speaking. But her stammered words came as clearly to his ears as though they had been shouted.

"Small-pox!"

He sat down heavily in the chair whence he had risen to receive her, and Miss Pilgrim through her tears saw him shrivel in a gust of utter terror. All his mask of complacency, of kindly power, of reticence of spirit, fell from him; he gulped and his mouth sagged slack. She moved a pace nearer to him.

"But it'll be all right, Mr. Baruch, if you'll just come to the Clinic at once and be vaccinated. It's only because we touched him—and the rugs. There isn't any need to be so frightened."

She could not divine the vision that stood before his strained eyes—the white face of a woman, weary with her ailment and the beautiful thing that blanketed her, beautiful and venomous like a snake. His senses swam. But from his shaking lips two words formed themselves: "My wife!"

"Oh, *come* along, Mr. Baruch," cried Miss Pilgrim. "Your wife hasn't touched the rugs. She'll be perfectly all right!"

He gave her a look that began abjectly, but strengthened as it continued to something like a strange sneer. For he was a connoisseur—he knew; and he was certain that Fate would never leave a drama unfinished like that.

THE DRAWN ARROW

By CLEMENCE HOUSMAN

THE king lay hid in a hollow of the red sandhills. He watched the poisonous grey asp flicking through the burnt crouch-thorn, and the little long-legged rat nimble at the fray, and the tawny flatwing that is never still; and no other life showed astir within the round horizon. Red sand was all the world, overhung by a yellow sky; the sun swung up the dome to his highest pitch.

"The half of my kingdom would I give for one draught of water."

Not many days ago he had been on his throne, a great king, with peace at home and conquering armies abroad. Then rose the tribes ripened to revolt by a traitor half-brother; and treason had opened his gates, and fired his palace over his head; and treason had broken his ranks in the field, so that of his first army none outlived the day save himself and his armour-bearer. Now was he cut off from all relief, for his foes warded the river and held the desert wells, knowing that a few more hours must deliver him to death if not to them.

The king waited his armour-bearer and waited in vain. "He has found no water. He is dead by thirst. He is slain. He is taken." The face of his armour-bearer rose to mind, such a face as grows over a true brave heart. "No," thought the king, "he is not taken: he himself would take his knowledge of me out of reach of the tormentors: he is dead."

He drew out a wavy dagger, and tested it again on his

THE DRAWN ARROW

sleeve that gave way like mist, on his palm that gave way like water. The studs of emerald gave a good grip; though he were weak as a child he could yet baulk his half-brother's hate of a promised satisfaction. "Me alive he shall not have to flay. No."

The anguish of thirst was terrible. It ached through every exhausted vein like fever, and like fever waxed and waned, stinging the brain into acute recognition of its scope, blanking it till the whole surrounding universe was impregnated with thirst, and a symbol.

Scents strangely strong took possession of his brain: the scent of a melon, the gold-laced melon that overhung the water-tank where as a boy he bathed; the scent of a woman, one bronze-dark woman; from a cup tinkling with mountain ice they drank together, and she struck him, the king, in lovely intoxication when the wine spilled into her bosom; the scent of sodden corn in the floods; the scent of camels by the summer wells; the scent of date-buds in the cool of dusk, when as a youth he stood at the ford, and saw across the water great manes stooped to lap. One draught bit keen from memory, quaffed on a day's chase, rank with bruised fennel; and another quaffed but late in the press of disastrous battle, tingeing red as he drank: it was the reek of his own blood he drew. And between all these and others came wafts of a far remembrance, a scent unrecognisable so long forgotten; it pervaded all others, it dominated all others, blossoming late from the remotest corner of the brain: it was the scent of his mother's milk.

The signal call of the restless flatwings gave a warning, and down in the trough of the sandhills he spied a figure coming. The king lay close in his lair, and pulled forward his screen of crouch-thorn. No faithful armour-bearer came here: this, by his fillet of yellow, was a man of the river hills, from a tribe of doubtful fidelity with claims to independence against him. Tough and spare he was, hairy, red

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

as the sand; a goatskin was all his clothing, and his only weapon a staff headed with stone; a wallet and a gourd swung at his back.

At sight of the gourd the king's hand sought his dagger, and his thirst became a torment quite intolerable. Lo! the man halted not far off, sat him down on the red hillside, and loosed the thong of wallet and gourd. At that the king thrust away his screen; his sword he left, for his dagger was enough; he turned inwards the bezel of his signet-ring, as he stepped out on the crumbling, shelving sand.

Little rat and grey asp ceased fight and scudded, and the flatwing shrilled away. The hillman turned, looking up, and sprang to his feet; he held up his right hand in token of peace, but the king came on. Then he caught up his staff, poised and swung it, but dropped it again, and once more offered the sign of peace. And then the king stood and held up his right hand, for he was dizzy and weak, and he saw that the man was wary, hardy, agile, more than his match.

So the hillman said, "Come on in peace"; and as the king came close he read in him the extremes of drought, and took the gourd and offered it instantly. And the king drank, blessed him by all his gods, and gave it back to him half-drained. Also food the hillman offered; and there they sat down together and shared like brothers, of dates and a morsel of bread, and passed the gourd to and fro; but from the hillman's hand hardly did it pass any lighter, for he saw how great was the thirst of the other.

Naught knew the red man of the shaking of a kingdom. He shaded his eyes, and looked.

"Yonder ride horsemen."

Not a sign of them could the eyes of the king descry. "Belike a troop of wild ass," he said.

"Three days," said the hillman, "did I follow the wild ass southward, seeking a lost pair of mine who shun the bit and disown the slayer of the night lion."

THE DRAWN ARROW

"Even so would the hillmen by their king."

"Lions are the hillmen and not asses; let the king know!" And he added the loyal formula: "As the sun's be the king's reign."

Still he looked. "Northward go these. They are fighting men, and many. They head for the passage of the river."

He caught up wallet and gourd. "Do they think to take the pass of our hills?" he muttered. "Not with arms in their hands, though they should be of the royal army!"

"Stay!" said the king; and the man turned and looked sharply at him who spoke with authority in the desert of the red sandhills.

"Water and food have you given for no asking; add thereto a third boon, the sound of your name."

"I have not asked yours," said the hillman sullenly.

"Harken! Go you to the hillmen, and warn them that till the king's army come they keep the pass of the hills against his enemies. In the presence of the king only shall you know my name; and ask you him then whatsoever boon you will and for my sake will he grant it."

"Give then a token."

"No token to bear lest you fall in with the king's enemies; for you the token of my hand and eye."

The king held up his right hand, took the other's held up likewise, and gripped it hard, and their eyes met and held till the hillman was satisfied. Released he said: "My name is Speed."

He glanced down at his palm: a rayed disk was faintly indented from the signet. One more keen look he cast. "As the sun's be the king's reign!" he said, caught up his staff, and swung away along the trough of the red hills.

Soon he was out of sight, and the king could see no living thing but the asp and the rat and the flatwing. Northward

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

hung a blur on the horizon, dust raised of the horse he could not discern.

Long hours trailed down the sky, and the king lay close, waiting for cover of night to amend his chances.

With the edge of dark came his faithful armour-bearer, burnt with thirst and despairing. Past speech, he gave to the king one poor plant of the water-cactus, his only gain. But the king bade him slake his own thirst with this, and live and listen. Then he told all that had passed between himself and the hillman.

The armour-bearer got his voice, and said, "O my lord, was this a hairy man, all red, hair and skin, small headed, long in the thigh?"

"Even so."

The armour-bearer smote his hands together.

"Oh, my lord, rise, haste and flee! the enemy have that man. He passed me, I hiding, though quick were his eyes; a nimble man and light in build, but going heavy and hard like a dog that runs mad. A misgiving I had then. And later, edging above the plain, I saw far off a chase, and my man running and doubling to win the farther side, and in the end ridden down and taken. Oh, my lord, he was taken alive!"

The king, without a word, took his sword and set forward. He pointed. "Yonder is the star of my birth; be that our guide, since reason can prefer no road."

On through the weary night they went as destiny led; slower and slower, for the armour-bearer flagged, then dropped, and the king sat and waited for light to show him his fate.

With one breath of dawn rose broad day.

"My star!" cried the king. "Look and live."

But the armour-bearer said hoarsely, "My lord, I cannot see."

"Yonder, in sight, is the river," said the king, "and my

THE DRAWN ARROW

horse hold the bank, and the foot cross thick as locusts, and the battle joins on this side. From all quarters the foe gathers, with pickets streaming in, keeping the wells no longer."

"Water!" muttered the armour-bearer, and got on his feet, but reeled and could not see.

Yet, in the end, both he and the king got down from the hills to the next well, and laying their sleeves over the mud of it, drew in delicious moisture of life. Also the water-cactus grew there.

While battle raged on the river bank, and the fortune of the day hung, a cry rose up, "The king, the king!" and with it the thrill that foretells victory ran through the royal army. And the enemy broke and fled, smitten without swords by the cry.

Now when the fight was ended and the slaughter, the king, riding by the river through the camping ground of the vanquished, spied among the herd of prisoners fillets of yellow, and bethought him of Speed the hillman. At his bidding his armour-bearer went, and presently came again with a man under his hand.

"My lord, two women there bound wear the yellow. Too dazed are they for speech or for knowing friend from foe. But this man of the prisoners knows of a foul thing to tell."

Then the prisoner told over how the hillman had been taken and brought before the traitor brother; when, though he denied stoutly all knowledge of the fugitive king, his goings were held against him, and torture was ordained to make him speak. Yet still he denied stoutly, spite of all persuasion by steel and cord and fire. Then the traitor, knowing that an army drew near, and most eager for his brother's person, sent swift horsemen to the river hills, who by guile got from the tribe the mother and the sister; and he purposed to torture them also before the eyes of the hillman. But the day coming, and the battle, they were left bound in the camp.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Where now is the hillman?" said the king.

"Yonder he lies in the river caves."

Awhile the king stood in thought; then he ordered that the mother and sister should be kept bound, and that none should speak with them, and he took his armour-bearer with him to the river caves.

"Go in," he said, "and see."

And the armour-bearer went, and came out the paler.

"It is the man. Go not in, my lord. Yes, my lord, he lives: his eyes are shut but he surely lives."

The king stood saying naught.

"My lord," said the armour-bearer, "the title of Most Faithful, ordained by you this day for my reward, I cannot hold. This poor hillman has the better claim."

"It is truth," said the king. "Great shall be his reward."

Then he turned to his guards and bade fetch the women.

"I have a mind," he said, "to try the man, and the greater shall be his reward."

And while his tent was pitching hard by he told his armour-bearer all that was to be done, and when the women came, put them in his hand for the doing, while he turned himself to the gathering of the captains.

So soon as the armour-bearer came again in at the tent the king bade for silence that he might speak.

"My lord, at the voices of the women he opened his eyes and sat, strong-alive yet. Oh, my lord, I got another with a stiffer throat than I to speak further. They, no less than he, doubted not the dead earnest of all; and they used all the power of woman-speech beseeching him for pity on himself and on them, and still he shook his head and denied that he had any knowledge of the king to deliver. Then that young woman, his sister, caught me by the knees beseeching pity of me, protesting that he knew nothing, for he would withhold nothing for the life of his mother and her, his sister, his twin sister. And yet when the order was

THE DRAWN ARROW

given for her to be led away as to death, the hillman muttered something at her ear: 'As the sun's be the king's reign,' I thought it to be. And the young woman looked him in the eyes, and kissed him, and with no word more, went out straight. Then was brought in a human heart fresh killed, and put into his hand as his sister's heart, with the heat and the beat of it still there. And he holds the heart and looks at his mother, and still he shakes his head."

"Great shall be his reward," said the king. "And the mother?"

"Oh, my lord, pardon!" said the armour-bearer, kneeling. "I have carried your command no further. Had you witnessed you could desire no further trial. Oh, my lord, spare him more."

"Go," said the king in anger, "and obey." And the armour-bearer went.

When he came again tears were running down to his beard.

"Oh, my lord, I was born of woman. She uncovered the breast to her son; she was taken out struggling and crying to him to save her. And a second heart was brought in and put hot into his hand. And he sits there, holding in his blistered hands those two hearts that he takes to be his sister's and his mother's, and now one and now the other he holds against his breast to keep it warm, and he mutters over them, and all he says is: 'As the sun's be the king's reign.'"

"It is enough," said the king. "Great shall be his reward."

Then by order, Speed the hillman was cleansed and dressed with wine and oil; and a costly ointment the king gave, fit for the healing of blood royal.

Then on the next day the king had the hillman brought and set down in the tent where he lay. And he entered alone and closed the entrance, having on him the royal boss and the purple, and all the gear of the throne.

On the red man had been put a linen tunic to cover most of him, but with the aroma of the royal balm the smell of

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

the torture came off him yet, and the look of torture lay dead on his face; and though the king in his splendour stood before him, the eyes of Speed the hillman stayed wide and blank without speculation, and when the king spoke to him by name they never moved.

Then the king, for a token, took what was left of the right hand of Speed in his own, and lifted it up, and fixed his eyes straight upon his and held so. And in a while the flesh he grasped quivered as the man's eyes wavered with sense; recognition swam into them; his hand answered feebly; a great straight grin came out; he drew a thirsty breath and laughed low in his throat. At the dreadful noise the king, loosing, stepped back, when Speed reached to the hem of his sleeve and touched it at his brow. "As the sun's be the king's reign," he muttered; and his head sank on his breast and his eyes settled.

Outside sounded the ringing of silver bells and the king uncovered the door of the tent, took Speed and set him there, and bade him look out.

Before the hillman's eyeballs came, at slow pace upon white asses housed with silver and blue, two women with fillets of yellow, and the gowns of the tribe under long veils of gold; and they held up their hands and called him by name, and brother and son. With a sound little and shrill like the voice of a bat Speed the hillman spun round twice, beat the air and fell flat.

Now the women were come and had bowed at the king's feet, and had taken up Speed upon their knees, and the king was fain with his own mouth to discover the circuits of his grace. But when a glimmer of recognition came with a shape of their names, yet the wells of joy lay all untouched, viewless and dark, the heart of the king so swelled with compassion that he had no voice to speak. He went out hastily, and calling his armour-bearer bade him go in and do the telling. "And when all things are made clear to

THE DRAWN ARROW

Speed the hillman, bring him out hither, in the midst of all to me hither." And the armour-bearer was pale and shook as he went at the king's bidding.

Under a wide tented canopy of gold sat the king to deal out justice without mercy, and honours and rewards without stint. And many and many came before him, but not the armour-bearer with the man Speed, whose reward was to exceed all others; till the king, impatient, sent for the armour-bearer and questioned.

"My lord, all has been told, and his mother and his sister have told it after me, and he says nothing at all but their names. His eyes never leave them, and now to one and now to the other he thrusts his hand, and beneath the closing of the gown feels at the warm beating of the heart."

"Send home the women," cried the king, "and make straight his understanding."

So the armour-bearer went, and again the king waited in vain, and again sent.

"What of the man Speed? What says he?"

"My lord," said the armour-bearer, "he says nothing at all." The king stamped for anger.

"Is this your duty? Have you not made him to know yet?"

"He knows! he does know. Oh, my lord, my lord."

"Bring him here then," cried the king. And the armour-bearer lifted his arms and cried: "Oh, my lord, my lord!" and went.

Every eye turned for the coming of the man above all others proved loyal and true by transcendent trial. In the midst sat the king on a throne, his nobles and his captains standing thick on either hand, backed by the glittering line of his guard. Six chosen men stood by him, three and three on either side; two swordsmen with blade drawn and up; two bowmen with strung bow and the arrow notched ready on the string; two spearmen with stooped spear. Brought

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

in by the armour-bearer before all these, the red man in the linen tunic, with the smell of torture and the face of dead torture, stood on his feet and lifted a patient inanimate gaze.

Then, smiling, the king rose up from his throne to honour the man. "Oh, faithful and true," he said, "great shall be your reward. No service of these the greatest in all my land has equalled yours. Turn your eyes and behold."

And Speed turned his head this way and that, and saw all heads bowed to the earth honouring him. Only the king and his six guards stood upright, and the armour-bearer who forgot to worship with his body.

"Hear first the recompense that a king gives unasked; then ask your boon, and by the word of one who drank with you in the desert, is it granted.

"Hear all ye the recompense that a king gives unasked.

"It is my will that henceforth and for ever the tribe of the hillmen be free of tribute and toll; and that they have beyond the river of the water-lands as far as their flocks can in a day travel.

"It is my will that the sister of Speed the hillman be taken to wife of what man he shall choose in all my land, barring only the blood royal.

"It is my will that the mother of Speed the hillman be entitled Honourable, and that he make choice of a city for her maintenance.

"Also I will that the yellow fillet be worn of the royal brides.

"And for you, oh, Speed, shall be herds of white asses, and lordship, and trumpets shall be blown for your entrance of a city, and no man, not of my house, shall have place before you. Also the fair virgins of my land shall be sought out for your choice. Also my half-brother who is taken shall be given alive into your hand, that you may strip off his skin to serve you with covering till yours be whole. And the title of Brother to the King shall be yours; and the

THE DRAWN ARROW

name you shall bear shall be my name, so only you yield me the gift of your name in exchange."

Then the king took off the boss of gold and set it on the head of Speed, and on his neck a collar of gold, and on his finger the signet-ring; and he took off his mantle stiff with gold and with it clothed Speed the hillman, whose eyes had sunk and whose head had bent while these honours were laid upon him. And the majesty of grace was all the adornment left to the king's person, therefore the more did all heads worship towards him.

Then the hillman lifted his head and looked into the eyes of the gracious king a while; with full understanding he looked; with mild eyes and weary he looked; with eyes that never shifted he held the king as he took the boss from his head and laid it on the throne and likewise the collar of gold from his neck, and the signet-ring from his finger, and loosed the mantle and let it fall. And he turned, and from the presence of the king and his great ones went out softly upon the hot sand, and turned his face towards the river hills.

All men there looking on the king held breath; his breathing only, in the silence, was heard rattling.

"Shoot!" said the king. Quick, quick the bowstrings rang; an arrow sang out across the sand, stopped mute at the heart of Speed.

Quick, quick and frantic high tore out recall: too late. The voice of the king's agony never reached the heart of Speed. He clutched the sand once and died.

No man but the armour-bearer dared look in the king's face when he stood by the dead man. The arrow stood upright in his back quite still. His hands had all they could hold.

But it was the voice of a king's displeasure that said: "One arrow!"

The armour-bearer with his left hand held up another; held up his right hand: it was stricken through.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Most faithful," said the King low, "bury you him—where he lies; you and none other."

He turned away with the face of a king, and the day went down on the last of the army winding away, and the armour-bearer alone smoothing the vacant sand half-way between the caves and the river.

But the king beheld the face of his most faithful armour-bearer never again.

Now when the king died, being of very great age and honours, and entered his chamber of silence for the last time, the new king, his son's son, according to custom entered also for the first time. And there for his reading on the walls with strong lines and fair colours was set out the record of the dead king's life from the star of his birth. And very long and splendid was the tale of his deeds and his conquests; and the woes that fell when his foes flourished because of the sleep of the gods were also set there and not diminished.

To the high-priest the young king said: "What means this arrow that stands in the heart of the king: with his foot on the neck of his half-brother he stands, and an arrow is in his heart; and never after find I him without it sticking there."

But the high-priest could not tell him, nor could any man; and the craftsmen who wrought the walls had not marked in those arrows.

In dull red were the arrows drawn, and in the last of them the line wavered. And the first arrow of all was lined beneath the feet of the king, and a red man giving him drink from a gourd in the desert.

Above the rest of the hillman and above the rest of the king the wind of centuries with equal wing has smoothed the vacant sand.

THE LAST LAP

By E. M. GOODMAN

THE specialist hurried out to his waiting cab, and Dr. Whately stood, with outstretched hand of farewell and the remains of his duty smile, anxious to leave the scene of a disappointing consultation.

No one took any heed of his hand and smile, and he had to follow the father and mother of the patient back to the drawing-room fire, and begin again the "talking it over" which is the usual sequel of the great man's words.

"Now, Dr. Whately, you will tell us what he really means!" began Mrs. Dowden, in the gentle, twittering manner which even her lately shed tears could not make other than cheerful.

"One feels, with a specialist, that one knows *all* there is to know; but perhaps we may make too much or too little of it." She answered the questions herself, gaining cheerfulness as she went on. Her husband, sitting absorbed in his own thoughts, had long given up hope of his daughter's recovery. He prided himself on "facing matters," and, with a kind of callousness not altogether selfish, spared no thought for pains and disappointments, looking past his own suffering with the same impatient aloofness he dealt out to others.

He hardly listened to Dr. Whately's recital—"The pain might be much alleviated—life may be considerably prolonged—the history of these cases is obscure." It was plain to the man what it all meant; plain, too, that nothing would convince his wife that anything was really wrong. She would confidently predict her daughter's recovery till the last day of life, and the day after would be sure it was all for the best.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

Dr. Whately knew this type, and appreciated it at its full worth. The best nurses are like that—always so radiantly hopeful about next time. But often there is no next time for the patient.

Mrs. Dowden began upon a string of considerations about the patient's diet and routine, and wandered off into reminiscences of her other children—their youthful likes and dislikes. Dr. Whately had never known them. He looked at the clock, and John Dowden broke in upon the momentary silence.

"Someone must go and tell Isabel something, or she will guess what he really said."

Dr. Whately faced round upon him.

"Do you think it is justifiable to keep the truth from Miss Dowden at this juncture?" he asked.

"Why not?" the older man said slowly. "What is the use of stating things in black and white? Everyone knows these things soon enough."

His wife chimed in. "Oh, yes, my dear; no one must tell dear Isabel about the dreadful things that might possibly happen. I have always found everything turn out much better than anyone expects. I shall just tell her the cheerful side of it all, and then we must trust in Providence. I am sure that Dr. Malloney's charming manner reassured her."

Dr. Whately looked at the clock again; his duty smile faded, leaving his face younger and more weary. He went on punctuating Mrs. Dowden's remarks with "quite so's," and she spun webs of optimism, soothed into a sense of having accomplished something.

The doctor rose, again at the point of departure, and looked down at the old lady's erect figure and the face from which a habit of contented activity was smoothing out all traces of grief.

"Shall I speak to Miss Dowden myself about Dr. Mal-

THE LAST LAP

loney's opinion?" he asked. He could not go away without making an effort for Isabel Dowden.

The suggestion was a relief to her parents, who each of them secretly thought it was the other's duty to "break it" to their daughter. Mrs. Dowden began interminable explanations of what it cost her to leave the task to a stranger. John Dowden waited till she had finished, irritably shaking his elbows—a habit of his when impatient.

"I shall find Miss Isabel upstairs?" asked the doctor when the two men were in the hall.

"Yes, she'll be there still," said Dowden, on his way to the front door. "You know your way?" He jerked himself back with relief into the ways of common life, reminded that there were letters to be answered.

As the doctor crossed the landing and passed the top of the back-stairs, he heard a sound of noisy sobbing.

"Them great doctors don't never come for no good," said the cook's angry voice. Then he knocked at a door, and Isabel Dowden said "Come in!" in her cheerful, matter-of-fact tone. She was sitting by the window of the little room, bending over an embroidery frame. It seemed to him that as he entered she resolutely quenched the appeal in her eyes and set herself to wait. Waiting was not her talent, but practice had counted for a good deal.

As Whately shut the door he seemed to hear his wife's pretty, gay voice saying: "Tell me directly, Ted! You know I never could bear to wait."

"I have come to tell you about Dr. Malloney's opinion," he said, gravely and immediately. "I am sorry to say that he does not anticipate any immediate abatement of the pain."

Isabel drew herself up, and straightened her thin shoulders, waiting for him to go on.

"Is there to be an operation?" she said at last.

"No," Whately answered; "there is nothing to be gained by an operation."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

He looked at her across the table, with its books and work tidied away in preparation for Dr. Malloney's interview, and was certain she misunderstood. There was a gleam of exaltation in her eye. In spite of all, she was her mother's daughter, and just as eager to catch at an illusory hope. In her relief, Isabel Dowden looked quite young; though she was thirty-two, and he had known her seven years, he had never seen her look young before. He cursed his clumsiness and her want of penetration. He felt certain the next question would be, "When shall I be well again?" and felt himself preparing the series of—"Next month," "By Christmas," "In the spring"—promises with which doctors hoodwink those who wished to be deceived.

He was sick of it all, and he had thought that Isabel had character enough to face realities. He thought he had detected in her a distaste for the sordid make-believe with which we smother what would be only wholesome daily routine, if we were content not to make pretence about it. He had an impulse to spare her the dismal farce of treating a mortal illness as though it were a convalescence.

But the question, when it came, was not in the form he expected.

"How long have I?" Isabel asked.

He paused, looking at her, with a kind of angry perplexity.

"Oughtn't I to ask? Isn't it etiquette?" she questioned, with a quick, flashing smile, that was new to him. "But I should like to know, and no one else will tell me. I thought you were not going to pretend."

So she had understood, after all.

"Perhaps three months, perhaps more," he answered bluntly.

"And will the pain be bad?"

"Yes; but for a woman, trained as you have trained yourself, not unbearable."

THE LAST LAP

"So long as one dies of it, what's the odds?" she said, half to herself. She lifted her hand from the table, and laid it on the doctor's arm.

"Thank you for telling me," she said softly. "I know you did not like doing it. I am glad to know. When you and Dr. Malloney went away, I thought I had to make up my mind to an operation and lots of pain, and then to beginning all over again. You know all about that. Now, if I can behave with decent self-control for three months, it will be all done."

"I see!" Whately said. "It is the feeling of having reached the last lap with some breath left."

He too straightened himself up and drew a long breath. A light wind came in at the window, and a distant sound that might have been a bugle-call pierced the hum of the streets.

"It's better not to tell them about its being the last lap," said Isabel, and the doctor remembered cynically how plainly they had been told, and how soon they had mislaid the information.

"You won't mind the pain much. You may take it from me that it will be quite bearable," he said curtly. "Thank you! You know what I am thanking you for? We dip the flag to courage like yours!" They shook hands, and his smile came up like a lantern-slide. Mrs. Dowden opened the door.

"You've reassured her, doctor, I am sure!" she said. "She looks better already. It's wonderful what hope can do, wonderful!"

"Hope!" asked the doctor, startled. "Oh—ah—yes!"

"That's a hope like another," he said to himself on the stairs. "With luck, the poor girl may get off with less than three months. Wonder why she takes things just like that! Perhaps, if I knew, I might want to wring someone's neck. It's the last lap, safe enough!"

OUT THERE

By E. GRANT WATSON

THERE was only one white man on the Karramatta cattle-station—a young Englishman who had come out from the old country in the hope of a job, had worked four years under direction, and now thought himself lucky to get sole control of a big going concern in that wild Kimberley district of North-West Australia. The company who owned Karramatta paid him four hundred a year and asked no questions so long as the returns were satisfactory. When, at the age of eight-and-twenty, he first took control of the twelve thousand head of cattle and the twenty or thirty natives who had been employed by his predecessor, it was with the resolve that he would stay for as short a time as necessary in so lonely and remote a district, and that when his salary had accumulated for a few years, he would start a place on his own. Of course, he imagined that he would enjoy the work, knew in fact that he would,—there was opening out to be done and room for improvements. Still, he was accustomed to the pleasures of town and the society of his fellow men, and this was no job for a white man to stay at for any length of time. He fancied that in a few years' time he would return again to his friends and the life he had been accustomed to lead, enjoy the theatres and music-halls, put money on the races, and fall neatly and easily into the place he was so lightly leaving. He did not realise that a life solitary and unshielded in the silent wilderness of the North-West would change the blood and brain of his existence, alter his heart, and uncover doubts, lusts and unsatisfied emotions.

OUT THERE

The company for which Jefferies worked provided a house for the white overseer—a house similar to many others possessed and lived in by white men who grapple with the indifference of a foreign land, demanding of it livelihood and wealth. It was built of corrugated iron and had a corrugated iron roof, painted white. There were two rooms in it. One room had a table and fire-place, two chairs, and one cane easy chair with cushions. The other room contained a bed and some kerosene boxes that served as a washing stand. There were nails driven into the uprights and supports, on which clothes could be hung. There was a wooden floor, common to both rooms, and a thin wooden partition to separate them. In front of the house was a verandah. In the evenings Jefferies would pull out the cane chair on to the verandah and sit smoking his pipe and looking across the country. Overhead he would see cloudless tropical sky, a few bats hawking for flies, and occasionally the larger wings of a flying fox. On every side, in the dim light, stretched the bush, flat and sun-baked. Scattered over its surface were gum-trees and mulga-bushes, that repeated themselves far into the distance, and for distance beyond distance. In the evenings he would sit, listening to the stillness. Kangaroos and wallabies would come out of the scrub and hop fearlessly within a few yards; he would hear the rhythmical rise and fall of the native songs, see the smoke of their camp fires, and hear the whirring, humming sound of the bull-roarers. At such times the natives, together with all his surroundings, beasts and trees, seemed to be in league. They were part of the land; he alone was foreign and out of place. It was as if some great menacing hand were stretched out, weighing him down, pressing him to the earth, leaving him terrified and weak. To save himself he would go indoors and light the lamp, and read back numbers of the English magazines and newspapers. During the first few months he would take days off whenever he could manage

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

it, and ride over to Turkey Creek, thirty miles away. This was the nearest township; he would stay the night at the hotel, talk with the storekeeper and have a glass of whiskey with anyone who dropped in, and then ride back the next day, fortified against another spell of loneliness.

As the weeks passed, bringing no change, he began to take an interest in the natives. At first he had looked upon them as a lot of niggers, all very much the same. Gradually he began to see them as individuals, human beings who were interesting and in some respects attractive. He liked their light cheerfulness, their good horsemanship, and the quality that made them so easily pleased with small things. He was less lonely when working among them, and felt sub-consciously that they were a possible means of interpretation to the mystery of the land, that seemed at one time to threaten and overpower with immense forebodings and at another to caress with a soft and hovering quiet. There were two families that camped near the house and did any little odd jobs that he wanted doing. In return for their services he would give them scraps and things he did not want. Their women cooked for him, and there were always two or three girls hanging about the compound. He decided to learn their language, and in the evenings had them on the verandah, where they would sit late into the night talking and smoking. For a long time he found the women ugly and repulsive, their faces were so unlike any human face that he had ever conceived of as being sexually attractive; but as time went on he found himself noticing them, looking at the slim, well-made bodies of the girls, watching their quick, graceful movements. It was not till he had been several months on the station that he admitted to himself that he was attracted, liked their close proximity, and looked forward to seeing the women on his return from work. He discovered in them a quick consciousness of the same fact. There was one girl of fourteen whom he had particularly noticed. She had

OUT THERE

looked at him quickly out of the corners of her eyes as women will. Her face, with its smiling cheerfulness, could not be called ugly; it was enigmatic and bestial perhaps, but attractive. Her body was desirable and beautiful. He sat long into the night thinking of her. He must possess her; she might help him to penetrate that baffling mystery of the land; with her help he might lose the sense of loneliness and injury from which he suffered. Things were different here from what they were in Europe, why pretend that they were the same? Besides, he wanted her, and that was all-important. Anyone who knew the circumstances would not blame him—and then no one need know. He walked down towards the native camp. There were two old men sitting by the fire. The women were asleep huddled together under a break-wind. Dogs rushed out barking, he beat them back, and the natives all woke up to shout and curse at the dogs. When all was quiet again, Jefferies sat down by the fire and filled his pipe; then he turned to old Manya, the girl's father.

"Manya," he said, "I want that girl of yours, the one I call Mary. You let her come back with me, be my woman?"

The old man put a stick into the fire, waited till it blazed, and handed it to Jefferies to light his pipe; he then picked up a red-hot piece of charcoal and placed it in his own clay. The other natives became interested and there was a stir among the women. All was silent when he spoke:—

"How much you give?"

"What you want?"

"You take my girl, you give something."

"A bottle of whiskey?" said the white man.

The old savage sat still for a few moments, looking into the fire, then nodded, "All right."

At once the whole party broke into excited talk and laughter. Jefferies felt ashamed and annoyed and wanted

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

to get away as soon as possible. Manya called out to the girl, who came forward shy and frowning.

"You go along with boss," he said.

"You come along with me, little girl, you be my woman?" The girl said nothing, but he felt her hand tighten on his. They stepped out together into the darkness. "Good night, Manya!" he shouted back. At some little distance he paused, put an arm around the girl's shoulders and looked back. Behind him were the noises of the camp, the red light of the fire, and black figures moving to and fro before it; in front was the dark outline of his house, on all sides the dim expanses of the wild land, whose mystery, identical with his own soul, he now strove to solve.

Mary was much envied by the other girls of the camp. She was very proud to live in the house and to be the possession of the white man; and yet the house didn't quite suit her; she wanted alterations. The bed was too small to sleep in, so they pulled the mattress to pieces and spread out the ticking on the floor and added dry leaves; this they covered with rugs and blankets. Then she wanted always to see the fire, so he pulled down the partition and they slept near the hearth. On the whole, Mary was an easily satisfied little person, she asked for nothing and was always happy to do what the white man wanted. She was frankly sensual, natural, and childish. Her habits were indeed primitive and rather ugly, but he took a sort of pride in her shamelessness and in her showing so frankly herself. Jefferies got genuinely fond of her. Sometimes as they sat by the fire in the evening he would look at her half affectionately, half quizzingly, as she sat solemnly smoking one of his old pipes; then he would run a finger down her spine till she laughed and wriggled. "You're a damned funny little baggage for a fellow to live with," he would say. She understood the drift of what he said, but not the words, and would answer inconsequently about some object that caught her notice.

OUT THERE

After the advent of Mary, Jefferies went less frequently to Turkey Creek, and, when he did, made no mention of her. He came to talk more and more with the natives; some of the men he got to like and admire as good trackers and keen hunters. They on their part extended to him their natural friendliness. They respected him, too, as boss, as a wondrously powerful being, the owner of guns and other magical instruments. They told him of their totems and their class organisation, and he, to please them, became a member of the Black Snake totem and took on a class name. Sometimes he would sit the night long, watching them prepare for Corroborees, that were celebrated in the early dawn. These sacred dances were held every two or three months, and neighbouring tribes would gather together for the occasions. Then would take place the chief religious ceremonies of the year and many rites of dancing and song. Jefferies would go apart with the men, for no women are allowed to be present at the preparation, nor are women allowed to witness the dance itself. He learned to join in the long-drawn nasal chants, and would sit among the slender spears. The spears were perpendicularly planted in the ground, among which the dark figures moved while they oiled and painted their bodies in long red and black streaks, with here and there white blobs and patches. Then when all was ready, they would file off to the place where the women were waiting, sitting grouped about the fires. Those who were not about to take part in the dance would join their womenkind, and let their voices rise and fall in a monotonous chant. At a sign, all the women would hide their heads under skins and moan, a big pile of stick would be kindled and the dancers would emerge, each with tufts of emu feathers on hips and shoulders, their red and white head-dresses swaying to and fro in the glare of the forked flame. To Jefferies their jerky mechanical movements suggested some spirits of the earth, sprung from it and worked on wires, thus clumsily

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

trying to express some of its savage significance. Sometimes, as he thus sat a silent spectator, a feeling would come over him that all this had happened before, that this was the most real experience that ever had happened, that he had lived many lives, and in each at such supreme moments had lost all individual desires and fears and had reached towards some supreme God who lived in the bush and in the heart of these friendly savages.

At the end of three years he was admitted as a member of the tribe with full rights; he spoke their language, and no longer used pigeon English. Several of the most important men offered him their daughters in exchange for knives, drinks, tobacco, and such desirable objects. He had seven women living with him in the little house with the iron roof. By this time the wooden floor had been eaten up by white ants, and those remnants that had not been eaten had been burnt, so that he and his women now sat on the bare earth, worn smooth and hard by their feet. Little scraps of bone and a great many old rags lay about here and there. The building was full of flies and the peculiar, strong odour of a native camp. He had learnt to sit native fashion and to eat with his fingers. As far as possible he would avoid all other white men. This was from a mixed feeling, partly of shame, but chiefly because he knew they could not understand the consolation he found in the native songs and dances and in the wild bush itself. They would not understand the innocent sensuality of savage life. They would leer at the sensuality, but never see the innocence. They could not see the truth of the religion he had found.

When there was business to be done on the farm with buyers and dealers, he was curt as he had been at first with me and never offered any hospitality. At certain intervals he had to go over to Turkey Creek, when there were reports to be posted to the company and affairs to be settled at the Bank.

OUT THERE

On these occasions he was shy and reticent and returned home as soon as possible. For ten years the company paid his salary into his account at the Union Bank. Each year they received satisfactory reports. The farm was doing twenty times as well as formerly, and the returns were proportional. At a general meeting the directors decided to give Jefferies a six months' holiday, and to pay his expenses, first-class return to Perth. They wrote to Linton, their agent at Wyndham, to this effect, and requested that he would visit Jefferies and tell him of their intention.

"Well—what do you want here?" he said in a gruff voice.

"I've come with a note from the company," said Linton, "and a message."

"Ain't they satisfied?"

"Oh, well enough."

"So they offer me six months' holiday," he mused. "Tell them I don't want it, that I'm here to work the farm, and as long as I do that to their satisfaction, they had better leave me alone. Now you'd better be going back, I reckon."

"A holiday would do you good," ventured Linton. "Think about it, man. They may take it badly, when they have acted so handsomely by you."

"I know what will do me good, thank you. You better be going."

Then a little shamefacedly, "There's no place to sleep here. You're not above sleeping in the bush, are you?"

After Linton had left, Jefferies flung himself down in a corner of the house and lay moodily looking out at nothing through the open door.

Jenny, a tall black girl of eighteen, came and sat down beside him.

"What is it?" she said.

He spoke without expression: "The people who sent me up here want me to go back and see them."

"But you won't go?" she said anxiously.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"No."

She stretched out a hand towards him. He turned to her and put his elbow on a piece of half-cooked meat. Suddenly, vividly, he saw himself with his own eyes of ten years ago. He understood the pitying, scornful look on Linton's face. "Damnation!" he cried, springing up.

"What is it?" said the woman. "Tell me what is your trouble. What did that man say?"

"It's all right, old girl, nothing to do with you. It's not your fault. I shall go out by myself a bit." And he walked past her into the night.

He was excited and upset. Why would they not leave him in peace? He was happy, no doubt he was happy, so long as they left him alone. Curse that man! He hated him for that look. Damn him for his contempt! Then, as if the thought had been thrown and stuck in his heart, he knew that he must go and see what it was all like, prove to himself that it was inferior, damned inferior, even the best civilisation. He would go to measure it, to sneer at it, as that beast had sneered; go for a month or two at most, and then he would come back. He strode quickly towards the house, and called out, "Jenny! Jenny!"

A dark figure came towards him. "Yes," she said.

"I am going away to-morrow. I shall be away for some time."

"Why are you going? You are going to your own people. Do you still love them?"

"No, I hate them."

"Then why do you go?"

He started to speak, then stopped. He could not find words to tell her why he was going, so he put his hand out and stroked her hair.

"I shall come back quite soon, and then never go away again."

OUT THERE

"You will live with white women," said the girl suspiciously.

"No."

"Yes, you will live with white women."

"Damn white women!"

The next morning he rode away towards Turkey Creek.

On the steamer from Wyndham to Freemantle, he spent most of his time leaning over the rail looking at the waves. He was shy of the white men and still more so of the women. He felt they were all noticing the way he ate and drank, and were whispering to each other that he was from the back country. The presence of the women disturbed him, and their light, superficial talk left him dismayed to know what to say. As the voyage went on, this shyness wore off to a certain extent; he was less boorish and rude when spoken to, and the last days of the voyage he would sit in the smoking room, watching the other men play cards and listening to their conversation in scornful silence.

At Perth he was met by the manager of the company and several of his old pals; they had heard from Linton that he might be difficult, and was suffering from too long a spell in the bush. They were tactful, and finding that he was not anxious to talk about his life, they talked about theirs, and he became interested against his will. At first their small enthusiasms were welcome. They were fuel to the smouldering heat of his contempt, but later, gradually and subconsciously, some forgotten part of himself came to appreciate the intrinsic quality of their lives. Commerce and trade and civilisation were fine big things, overpoweringly big; and he respected against his will the men who were the slaves and the lords of so much power. The power they gave to their women and the pride they took in dressing their wives especially impressed him. It seemed that they measured their own strength by the beauty and appearance of their women

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

folk. The bush and the little house he had left, the memory of the strong black women and the fat little half-caste babies fell into the background and became submerged beneath the superficiality of this other world and the excitement of re-entering civilisation.

The manager of the company was anxious to do all he could for Jefferies, and so kept his time full of entertainments and insisted on his meeting a great many people. Amongst these was a Miss Muriel Thornton, a nurse at the Perth Hospital. Miss Thornton was thirty years of age, she moved among a set of other young women with ideals and aspirations similar to her own. Her religion was to have a good time and to be thought respectable. She justified her existence by nursing the sick at Perth Hospital and keeping her eye open for the possible man who might do.

Jefferies was to her a good-looking, strong man with a good salary that was about to be raised, and money in the bank. Certainly he might do. She decided to marry him.

At first he was frightened of her; then attracted, then disgusted at her pruderies, then enchanted by her contradictions, and finally in love. His past life now seemed very remote. Civilisation, with all its nervous, compelling strength, had reclaimed its prodigal child; and now Muriel, its daughter, a significant and menacing symbol of its greatness, covered the entire surface of his life.

She was a wonder to him. It was her lack of simplicity that seemed most wonderful. He felt she was hiding something; and in a way it was a compliment to his manhood that she should appear this changeful, contradictory, complex creature. She had a scale of values, those concerned with sex especially, that differed entirely from anything with which he had come in contact. She seemed to value herself on an altogether arbitrary and yet strangely varying scale. Once or twice he found himself comparing her with the black women. When he came to ask her to marry him, it

OUT THERE

was in all humbleness of spirit and a feeling of unworthiness, and when she accepted him, he had a sudden but quickly passing impulse to tell her of his life on Karramatta station.

He could not say to himself that he was ashamed of his past life, he felt it far away—natural in its way—but different. Now he was having a fine time, giving dinners, making up parties, going upon expeditions with Muriel and her sister at Cottisloe, and in the Darling Ranges.

When four months of his holiday were up, they were married, and he was faced seriously with the fact of having in two months' time to go back.

Yes, he had decided to go back, though he had been tempted to start on his own, but the company had urged him, and the raise in salary was larger than he had anticipated. He agreed, to oblige them, to go back for two years. Then they promised a better job a few miles out of Geraldton, where there would be plenty of society for him and his wife. His friends told him he was a changed man, and so he felt himself to be. He was a white man once again, and a white man he was going to remain; he would make a proper homestead when he got back, and get fellows to come over from Turkey Creek to make things bright for his wife. And if things got too dull, they could afford a holiday.

The next two months he and his wife spent in honeymooning on the south coast. In this time he learnt much about a woman's life, and was surprised at the number of pomades, scents, and appliances that she used. It pleased him that she should take such care of her figure and the texture of her skin. He told her how rough things would be in the bush. She laughed, and said that she was prepared for hardships, but that she would keep herself like a lady as long as she could.

At length the six months came to an end, and they started up north. Jefferies had anticipated that there might be some little trouble with the women, and had arranged that his wife

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

should stay at Wyndham, while he went on in advance and put things in order, and saw to the building of the new house.

The first thing was to have the old house pulled down and to send the women all back to the camp. They were at first clamorously indignant, but later sullen and, as he thought, submissive. Four men came over from Turkey Creek with two waggons and a great many pieces of corrugated iron. They went and returned several times, and finally a large four-roomed house was erected. It had a deep verandah, and when painted white looked bright and cheerful in the clearing. Jefferies furnished it after the pattern of the boarding-houses in West Perth. He was pleased with it and looked forward to showing it to his wife. When she finally did see it, she was tired and stiff after a long coach-journey. She was horrified at the extreme loneliness of the situation and querulous as to the future.

The day after her arrival a horrible incident occurred. Jefferies was out on the verandah, nailing up a piece of Chinese matting to keep the sun out, when he heard a series of sharp screams. He dropped his work, rushed through the living room to the kitchen; there in the middle of the room Jenny, a black and terrible figure, had got his wife by the hair, and was dragging her to and fro, up and down.

"What for you steal my man, you dam white woman?" she panted.

"God damn you, you black bitch!" yelled Jefferies, and struck her with all his strength on the ear. Jenny let go her hold and reeled back. She clutched the edge of the door to save herself from falling. A stream of blood ran down her neck and over her breast and dripped on to the clean boards of the floor.

"Get out of here, damn you! If ever you come back, I swear I'll do for you."

Without speaking, she turned and, clinging to the door, stumbled out down the steps.

OUT THERE

Jefferies turned to his wife. She had sunk into a chair and was holding her head in her hands. The noise she emitted could not be described as a sob or a scream. It was a mixture of the two, rising and falling in desperate conflict with one another. He stood looking at her, at a loss what to do or say. He muttered to himself, cursing, then knelt down beside the distraught woman and tried to take her hand. Her sobs redoubled and she blubbered out: "Oh, you men, you are all brutes, I think!" Jefferies felt somehow that he was to blame, but he didn't know quite where or at what stage the fault had begun. He felt not so much sorry for her as intensely irritated, and wanted to be away out of sound of those choking sobs. Suddenly she sat up straight and looked at him. It was a different being and a different soul speaking to him from that puffy, tear-stained face.

"You lived with that woman? You're her property. You beast!"

"Yes," he said, "so would you, if you had been in my place."

They were both dead to any grotesqueness in the remark. She flung herself forward again with redoubled sobs. In a while these ceased and she let herself fall back and lie in the chair with eyes closed.

Fortunately for both of them there were plenty of things that had to be done, and so the painful claims of the situation had to find their place among the necessities of everyday life. Muriel was frightened, shocked and outraged, and she insisted on being taken away; she made him feel that he had behaved badly, shamefully by her, and he was glad enough to make any concession. They agreed that he was to give up the position and that then they should start on their own in a more civilised and accessible part.

In the meanwhile Muriel was in terror of the natives. He assured her that no harm should come to her, and walked over to the camp to say that no natives should come near

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

the house. His old friends looked and listened silently and without comment. He returned to find Muriel nervous and on the verge of hysterics. He gave her his revolver to assure her. For a week he worked near the homestead, and all went with its accustomed smoothness. During this time he saw nothing of Jenny.

Then about two days later happened what he had not contemplated as possible. On returning home from work, he saw an odd-shaped bundle of clothes on the verandah. He hurried towards it. As he mounted the steps he saw his wife's foot sticking stiffly towards him; beyond and partly soaked up by the skirt and petticoat was a pool of congealed blood. His wife's head was beaten almost out of recognition. Her breast-bone was broken in by the blow of a heavy digging stick such as the native women use.

He stood white and trembling, dumb with rage and horror. He felt suddenly sick, and grasped the rail behind him. Then rage swept over him again. He stepped over the body into the house, snatched up a rifle, crammed cartridges into the magazine, and set off at a run towards the native camp. He would shoot every one he saw. He'd teach them.

There was not a native in the camp; a smouldering fire and one mangy puppy was all that was left. The mulga-bushes stirred gently in the breeze, and from the distance came the mocking yaffle of a cookaburra. Silence, and the long blue shadows of distance, forerunners of the coming night, that lengthen and imperceptibly cover the land. Here was no answer for a man mad with rage and discord. He rushed on into the bush, wild to find something to be avenged on. Then, suddenly realising the futility of trying to find a native who did not wish to be found, he trudged slowly back to the house.

That night he sat by his wife's body. Behind him was the empty house, symbol of civilisation, of his hopes and intentions, the material concrete sign of his marriage; and

OUT THERE

there at his feet lay the other. All around was the intense stillness of the bush. His thoughts drifted out into it.

He heard far off the hum of the distant bullroarers. The savages were speaking with their God: the God of the land. A religious mood crept over him and a feeling of harmony with all that outside, wild world, a feeling of comprehension for what was mysterious and silent.

He started from this mood, reproaching himself for letting his thoughts wander from his dead wife. He dozed to sleep. Then woke to find himself bitten over face and hands by mosquitoes, and the sun rising. He got up stiffly, looked at the corpse in front of him and shuddered. Things happen quickly in a hot country and it was not a pleasant sight. Once more he stepped over it, and went and fetched a spade and began digging a hole. When he had the hole sufficiently deep, he picked up the body that lay on the verandah and carried it to the place, dropped it in, then quickly shovelled back the earth. He felt like a murderer; he had brought her up to be killed and mutilated, and was all alone with that thought. And now he had buried her quickly, uncereemoniously, and without reverence. He wanted in some way to make up. In her room he found clothes, one of her hats and some of the little feminine things she used. These he wept over sentimentally. All the things in the house mocked at him, and he hated them.

That night and the next he spent in the bush; he lay on the ground and listened to all the familiar sounds. They came and seemed to carry him away from all the tragedy of the last days, all the feverish haste and bustle of the months in Perth. The stars shone steadfastly and the trees swayed and rustled their leaves; wallabies and the boody-rats came and played close to him, and he watched with pleasure. Then he stretched himself face downwards and wept. He thought he was crying for his wife, but in reality he was crying like

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

a child who, after some rash, disastrous adventure, had come back to its mother to be kissed and consoled.

Ten days passed, and he remained alone by the empty house and newly filled grave. Once he thought of riding into town to get a clergyman to come and read a service over the grave, but his heart failed him, and he stayed on. One day a white man rode up to the house. Jefferies saw him in the distance and recognised him as one of the prospectors from the plains. His instinct was to escape notice, but instead he walked out to meet the visitor. He hailed him and asked him to come in and have a drink.

The man admired the house and asked Jefferies what his wife thought of the locality. Jefferies' thought moved instinctively. His tongue was parched in his mouth. He felt a murderer. "She is dead," he gulped.

"Good Lord! I am very sorry. How very sad!" said the man. Jefferies was silent.

"I am very sorry for you. How very sad!" The stranger was embarrassed. "What did she die of?" he blurted out.

Why the words rose to his lips or where they came from Jefferies did not know, but he answered without a pause, "She died of fever."

"This is no country for white women," said the man. "Too far to ride and fetch a doctor, I suppose."

"Yes, she was frightened and wouldn't let me leave her, and then she died. You understand, I had to bury the body at once."

"When did this happen?"

"Ten days ago."

"And you've been here ever since?"

"Yes."

"You mustn't stay here any longer. Go into the town. If I hadn't to go across country myself, I'd go back with you. You mustn't stay here, it's bad for you; enough to send any man cracked."

OUT THERE

The prospector was quite anxious about Jefferies. He stayed and talked for some time. Jefferies constrained himself to be civil, anything to get rid of the fellow without suspicion. He promised to go back to town and bring back a clergyman to read a service over the grave. In an unreasoning, blind way he felt that this would somehow put him straight.

The next day he saddled his horse and started off towards Turkey Creek. Five miles he rode through the bush, then he stopped, turned his horse's head and rode back. The homestead was empty and still. He was lonely and bitter and longed to see a human being, yet was cut off from them. Unable to face the men at Turkey Creek, he would have given all he had to talk truthfully with a human being. He walked miles into the solitary bush, then flung himself down exhausted and lay still, thinking: it was monstrously unfair that he should be cut off from all human life, afraid and ashamed to meet his own people; the natives he had sworn to kill if ever he saw them. And if he did kill them, what then? He thought of their feasts and dances, of their simple, confident beliefs. The past ten years of native life came crowding back. The time at Perth and the south coast seemed irrelevant, trivial and silly. He turned from it as from a sickness. Perhaps in the open spaces and glades between the slender, flesh-tinted eucalyptus stems he might find health again. He thought of his wife, the superficial vulgarity of their relation, the silly jokes they had laughed at. What false creatures they had appeared to one another! There was nothing he loved in her; even her sensuality was decked out in the vulgarity of ladylike behaviour. Then uncontrolled rage rose in him. Why couldn't they leave him alone? He had been happy alone and in touch with the things that bring peace and satisfaction. The women he lived with were simple and understood him, and he understood them; they knew how to take a blow unflinchingly, and

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

bore their pain in silence or else expressed it in direct, effective action. He cursed civilisation. Why had it not left him in peace? He had found satisfaction in the wild bush, and then forsaken it. Now he was alone. Curse them! Curse them! Curse them! The fit of passion spent itself. . . . He had to go back to the house for food. Here he lounged in dejection for some days, muttering to himself and sometimes shouting out loud.

One morning, as he came out into the compound, he saw Jenny standing some fifty yards from him. His heart beat violently as he walked towards her. When about five paces distant, he stopped with a confused rush of thoughts streaming through his brain. He looked wonderingly at this mysterious creature that had stepped out of wild, unreckoned time and space to claim him. She was his slave. The white man in him spoke.

"Well, what have you come back for, you black devil?" He strode towards her. "What have you come back for, damn you?"

"I come back cook for master, look after master."

He grasped and shook her by the shoulders. "So you've come back, you black slut, have you?"

She looked up at him fearlessly, their eyes met, and she wriggled herself nearer. Then suddenly he clasped her to him, forced her head back roughly and pressed his mouth to hers.

HIS WIDOWS

By VIOLET HUNT

THERE was a little wistaria and ivy-clad cottage on the road to D—, and two maiden ladies lived there. They were of an age, forty-five, and they had been house-mates for the last ten years. They were supposed to be rich, and known to be eccentric. It is well to have such a reputation in neighbourhoods like that of D—, implying as it does complete liberty of action, combined with perfect social consideration. The toilette and the domestic appointments of Miss Varney and Miss Leven left nothing for a censorious world to desire, while their habits of a just sufficiently unconventional nature inspired interest and amusement. They were, of course, open to the imputation of being unmarried women of a certain age, but there was not the slightest hint of anything old-fashioned or old-maidish in their appearance or in their surroundings. There were no tatted or crochet chair-covers, no painted hand-screens, no stamp-snakes, in their drawing-room; their clothes were exquisitely fashionable, and came down from London, and perhaps Paris. But the material of these clothes was invariably black, and they both wore what looked very like widows' caps, of the same identical pattern. There their eccentricity came in.

Once a fortnight they paid a visit, bearing two similar bunches of white flowers, to a cemetery on the other side of the town of D—, but no one ever discovered whose grave it was that they took an interest in, though some curious, otherwise unoccupied, persons, had thought it worth while to play hide-and-seek with the two ladies among the tombs, without success, so cleverly did the mourners dodge them.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

They had not many friends in the town of D——, nor did they seem to care to make any; but after a while, a young girl, called Lucy Gray, who had but very recently left school, succeeded in ingratiating herself where more important people had failed. She was sweet and simple, yet shrewd, and soon she knew more of the inner life of Miss Varney and Miss Leven than anyone. She thought them romantic, and admired them openly, and the ladies did not in her case disdain the tribute of this subtle and seductive form of flattery.

She used to find it delightful to go and sit with them, in the long winter evenings, over the fire, and to confide her little doings and little troubles to their sympathetic ears. She sat on a low stool exactly between the two, and talked, and turned her eager face first to one and then to the other, without exercising any particular discrimination as to the precise recipient of each particular confidence; for though they differed from each other as much as two unrelated human beings are likely to do, they seemed, by skilful modification and adaptation of habits and idiosyncrasies, to have made themselves as one. To Lucy Gray it seemed at any rate to be so.

But in appearance they differed a good deal. Miss Varney was dark and eager-looking, and a little imperious in manner. She laughed more than Miss Leven, and betrayed a fuller, at times more cynical, humour. She read the modern magazines, and kept herself up to date. Miss Leven was softer, perhaps sillier, certainly more sentimental. She was a little inclined to be stout, her complexion was still wonderful; she took life more easily than Miss Varney.

Had taken it; for surely, during these last ten years that they had lived in D——, life had stood still for both of them!

The life of little Lucy Gray was but just beginning, in a mild, idyllic way; she told the ladies all her innocent affairs, and they gave her the promptest interest and sympathy; but

HIS WIDOWS

she came to notice, when she looked up into the face of either, that their gaze was seldom if ever bent on her who was confiding in them. No, their eyes were generally raised, and fixed, severally, on two large framed cabinet photographs hanging over the bell-pull on either side of the chimney-piece.

There was nothing very odd in this, except that the two photographs were in every respect identical!

It was the likeness of a man in full regimentals—handsome, dogged-looking, with a heavy, self-sufficient jaw, and gentle eyes and an elusive mouth. Under the print was written, in a bold, decided handwriting, the name "Robert F. Musgrave," and a date, "1870."

Later on, when she came to know the ladies better, Lucy Gray was taken into their bedrooms and shown various things: Afghan trophies, Indian ivories, Burmese shawls—two of each, invariably; but what interested the girl most was that, though there were two separate rooms, the same likeness, enlarged and coloured in this instance, hung over the bed of each.

Lucy Gray was loving and curious. She put the story of her two friends—one story, two women—together as well as she could, and gloated on it. She realised that these two ladies had loved the same man, and that this was his likeness. They had lost him, how, she could not guess, but at any rate he was not here, nor had been these ten years. They mourned him, therefore; but what she could not understand was, that they should mourn him in such strict concert. It seemed to form the very bond of union between them: now, according to her simple theories, it should rather have forced them apart!

Was it possible for two human beings so to compound with jealousy—jealousy, that is even stronger than love?

What grown-up curiosity could never have achieved, her sweet childish sympathy was able to draw from them. She sat one evening in her accustomed place between the two;

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

she had had a little love encounter of her own that day, which she fondly hoped was going "to mean something," and she had been telling these two kind women about her innocent hopes and her fears. Solicitude for her own happiness and the emotion of confidence had brought the easy tears to her eyes. She became, unconsciously, silent awhile, and her brown, liquid, suffused glance was fixed, she knew not why, on the portrait of Robert Musgrave. Miss Varney caught her expression and was touched by it.

"You pretty child!" she said suddenly; then laying her hand on the girl's bent head, she said to Miss Leven, sitting opposite:

"How he would have admired her, would not he, Kitty?"

"I was just thinking so," Miss Leven replied.

"Who do you say would have admired me, dear Miss Varney?"

"A man of singularly good judgment, my dear, where women's looks were concerned. A man who could have had his pick of all the prettiest women in England, and who knew what was what!"

"That man!" said the *ingénue*, quickly pointing deferentially to one of the photographs. "He was a great friend of yours, was he not?"

"A great friend of mine—yes—and of Miss Leven's," was the answer.

Miss Leven's eyes agreed.

"And was he engaged to——?" began Lucy Gray, and stopped, overwhelmed with confusion, "*to either of you*" was what she had saved herself from saying.

"To neither of us, dear," Miss Varney replied quietly. "He was just a very great friend."

Miss Leven rose and left the room. Lucy thought there were tears in her eyes.

She turned round impulsively to the woman who was left and stole her hand into hers.

HIS WIDOWS

"Dear Miss Varney!" she murmured, "have I been stupid?"

"Not at all, dear," Miss Varney answered cordially, holding Lucy's hand closely. "We are a couple of absurd old women, that's all! Robert Musgrave was our friend, and we loved him. My dear child, what things I am saying to you!"

She gave a faint, nervous laugh, and put Lucy's hand away. But the girl took hold of her again, and begged:

"Dear Miss Varney, do tell me about it. It does interest me so—to compare notes, you know. I am not such a baby really! I know what love means!"

"Do you really?" The older woman smiled. It was a sweet, confused, self-mocking smile, that showed Lucy what a lovely and attractive woman Miss Varney must once have been, and that not so very long ago. "Do you know," that lady continued, "you are a very insinuating little thing?"

"Tell me, now do tell me," pleaded Lucy, seeing, and quick to profit by, the advantage she had gained. "Tell me all about him! Couldn't you? Oh, I do think him so handsome!"

"The most handsome man of his time!" Miss Varney corroborated her, "and quite the most remarkable. He did wonderful things. Any woman might have been proud to have been loved by him—or to have had him for a friend."

"But he *did* love—a woman?" cried the young girl eagerly, catching at the first triumphant part of Miss Varney's sentence, not its lame and impotent conclusion. Her little hesitation was due to a thought that would force itself in—ought she not to have said "*Two women?*"

"Did he? Some woman, of course. But we never knew anything about that," said Miss Varney loyally. "He was very fond of Kitty and me. We both knew that, and were proud of it—his respect and esteem. I don't think that there was any difference in his way of looking at us! He was very fond of us—he flirted with us both."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Was he a flirt, then?" asked the girl in a disappointed tone.

"Terrible, my dear!" Miss Varney said, smiling, with retrospective indulgence. "But we don't judge him. Why should we? He could no more help flirting with us or any other pretty girl—we *were* pretty, you know—than we could help falling in love with him. He never pretended, at any rate. And he never knew. That is as well, isn't it?"

Her sad little smile pierced the girl's very heart, and gave her the first conception of the heroism and grace that may lie in the voluntary assumption of a comic view of things tragic.

"Was he married?" she blurted out.

"My good child!" was all Miss Varney deigned to answer. She was, however, not really cross, but went on laughing. "What sort of books have you been reading? I shall begin to think that your mother has not been looking after you properly. . . . Robert Musgrave died at the age of forty, unmarried."

"But then I *must* say I don't understand?"

"No, dear," said Miss Varney, tapping Lucy's head amicably, "but you must not let romantic notions run away with you. Did I not tell you that though Miss Leven and I—she will, I am sure, not mind my speaking for her: we are one in this!—though we loved him with an equal love, he was equally indifferent to us both—in *that way*? There was no mistake about it. Don't let there be, in your little mind. It is an absurd story, but it is all the story we have got, Kitty and I. We have it between us, as two children have a favourite toy. We came together after his death, and admitted that we had both been fond of him, and he of us. We decided, as it were, to throw our recollections into the common stock. It makes it bigger—more worth having, don't you see? And it makes it easier, to mourn him together. We shall not be so very long behind him, I trust!"

HIS WIDOWS

"And to which of you, I wonder, will he belong in heaven?" was what the ingenuous Lucy thought to herself; but aloud she said, "Dear, dear Miss Varney, I hope you will live for ever!"

She put her arms round Miss Varney, and her eyes wandered to the symbol of this strange widowhood on Miss Varney's raven-grey hair. Her thoughts flew to the other widow of Robert Musgrave, the sentimental one, who had no sense of humour, and who, she shrewdly suspected, was crying her eyes out in the cold, fireless dining-room at this very moment. She remembered Miss Leven's soft round cheeks and pale yellow locks, and decided in her own mind that though in her youth she must undoubtedly have been the prettier of the two, yet that Miss Varney must have been by far the more vivacious and interesting.

Miss Leven, wherever she was, did not come back.

"I wonder if I might say to you what I have been thinking?" Lucy asked Miss Varney timorously.

"Of course, dear, say anything that you like! I have given you my confidence—our confidence, I might say—and I do not withdraw it."

"It is this—that I think—somehow—that Mr. Musgrave must have liked—you best."

Miss Varney's brow clouded as it had not done in the whole period of her intercourse with Lucy Gray.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "don't think to please me like that! It is a wrong note, and you must never strike it. I want no concessions to my vanity. Mr. Musgrave did not care for one of us more than the other, and that is the secret of our bond—Miss Leven's and mine. Do not you see that we are co-partners—in his indifference, if you like to put it so,—and a little more on either side would at once destroy the balance! It would be disloyalty to Miss Leven if I were to let you talk like that to me."

She sighed, then she laughed. "I really don't wonder that

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

people call me eccentric!" she said. "Talking like this to a mere child! What can have become of Miss Leven?"

"You don't know how I love it!" exclaimed the mere child. "You are quite sad, and yet you make such funny fun of yourself all the time, as it were!"

"Is it the saving grace of humour that I have got?" asked Miss Varney, smiling again; and again the girl was penetrated with the conviction of her past and present attractiveness. "That is what you like? I wear my rue with a difference—that's all."

"Differently from Miss Leven!" the girl could not help saying. "She is sweet, too, but she never says funny things. You can never have both been alike in that!"

Miss Varney, to her surprise, accepted this little compliment, adding, however, "She was a great deal prettier, at any rate. Here she comes! We have no secrets from each other, Kitty and I! Kitty, I have been telling this child all my story—our story!"

Miss Leven had been crying; but she answered, without a shadow of umbrage, "You know, Alice, that you can always speak for me."

"Yes; our minds are quite Siamese in that respect, are not they?" Miss Varney rejoined, laughing. "You look cold, Kitty. Come and get warm. I was just telling Lucy how awfully pretty you used to be!"

There was a caress in her voice.

"And I told Miss Varney that I could see that for myself!" said the child, with astounding duplicity. "But—I *am* so puzzled about *him*!"

"How so?" asked both the widows at once.

"Well—how can he have been so blind?"

Miss Varney persisted in taking an entirely humorous view of it all. "Ah, you see," she said, "he had a great deal of choice. There were so many other pretty and funny women in the world! But Kitty and I are quite content

HIS WIDOWS

with what Fate was good enough to mete out to us. One cannot have everything, and there is no bitterness——”

“Except the bitterness of death!” Miss Leven unexpectedly put in, and Miss Varney stared at her.

“And that is easier to bear in concert, isn’t it, Kitty?” she resumed, with persistent cheerfulness. “Good-night, dear little Lucy. Kitty looks tired. Don’t go and tell all D—— about the two silly old women, but come and see us again soon.”

Lucy Gray kissed them both; her maid was summoned; she put on her wraps and walked home. She thought a good deal of what she had heard; and the sum of her reflections and her sympathy for Miss Varney and Miss Leven came to this, that their theory of life, poetical as it was, was hardly satisfactory.

“They are two dear, strange, sweet women!” she thought to herself. “Really and truly eccentric, I suppose; but as far as I am concerned, I shall hope to have a whole man to myself, some day! I am worldly, I fear!”

She took to thinking earnestly of the man she was just beginning to care for, and who had seemed lately as if he were going to care for her, and decided that nothing would induce her, even if it never came off, to share even his memory with another woman.

She was not called upon to do so. In a very few days her fate was decided; and so imperious was the will of the man who adored her, and wished to have her all to himself, that the girl of eighteen was married to him out of hand, from a relation’s house near London, and taken away without even being given time to communicate the news to her two old friends in person.

Two distinct but rather similar wedding presents—one from Miss Varney and the other from Miss Leven—followed her abroad, and she was for the moment too much absorbed in her happiness to notice that Miss Varney’s letter

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

was dated from London, while Miss Leven's gift bore the postmark of a town in the north of England. When, later on, she went back to her old home on a visit to her mother, she was told that the interesting ménage of the little house on the D—— road had been broken up, and that the two ladies now lived apart. It was not until long after, when she had sought out and seen both Miss Leven and Miss Varney separately, that she learned why, and that "we did not quarrel, dear, but circumstances made it impossible that we should continue to live together any more!"

.

Among other "Siamese habits" of the two—to use Miss Varney's own fond, foolish phrase—was this one: they carried each a duplicate bunch of keys. These keys were objects of beauty chased and silvered, and depending from silver chatelaines of antique workmanship. On the night that Lucy Gray left them, the two ladies sat awhile in front of the fire before retiring to their rooms for the night, and Miss Varney's keys lay in her lap, catching the warm rays of the dying firelight on their facets.

"How pretty gold light is on silver!" she said, letting the keys play idly through her fingers. "They want redipping, though, I think."

"Indeed they do," said the other, beginning to finger hers. "Let us have them done. Shall I send mine first, or will you?"

"It doesn't matter which," Miss Varney said. She began to pick up the keys and tell them over one by one. "The bookcase! . . . the linen press! . . . the storeroom! . . . the bureau! . . . I can't remember what this key belongs to?" she said suddenly.

The face of the woman sitting opposite to her suddenly became blanched and grey with fear. "Alice!" she said helplessly.

HIS WIDOWS

"Well—Alice, that is my name!" said the other woman impatiently, staring at her. "Are not you well, Kitty?"

"No—only I am afraid that you have somehow or other got hold of my bunch!" Miss Leven said, in a far-away kind of voice.

"Well, and if I have? There is no difference!"

"There is a key on my bunch—an extra key——"

"An extra key? I don't understand you, or your agitation, Kitty!"

"No, dear. It is the key of a little desk that I have——"

"I see!" said the fiery Miss Varney. "You have a secret, Kitty. Say no more."

She turned a proud profile to Miss Leven, and put her hand on her heart.

"Dearest Alice, don't please, take it so seriously! It is nothing—no secret—merely the key of a little old desk of my mother's, where I keep a few papers."

"Naturally. Papers that you do not care to have me see!" Miss Varney replied haughtily. "There is no more to be said. I should like the subject dropped, if you do not mind."

She was quivering all over.

"But can we go on living together?" asked the other, giving voice to her secret preoccupation.

"No, I don't see how we can," Miss Varney, driven to bay, answered her. "I am a fool, I know; but it was not in the bond——"

"I'll show you the papers!" said Miss Leven desperately.

"Oh, no, no; please do not speak of such a thing. You have a perfect right to have secrets from me, but I confess—I—don't like it. . . . It is no good, Kitty! Look here, my dear, don't let us speak of it any more, but go to bed, and we will see how we feel in the morning. . . . Heavens! I never knew what a temper I had till this moment!" She put her hand to her head.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"No," said Kitty Leven determinedly. "I could not rest, thinking that we had quarrelled. You must——"

"We have *not* quarrelled. It is only my temper, as I said. Good God, Kitty, will you go?"

"No, Alice. I would rather you would look at the contents of my desk, if you don't mind. I have a right to demand it, after all you have said. What I wished so much to avoid cannot be worse than this! And now I insist on your looking over my desk. I will go and fetch it."

"I have told you I had so much rather not."

"Ah, but you spoke of our parting! That was enough for me."

She rose as she spoke. Her complexion was now quite pale and ashen, while the sallow Miss Varney's cheeks wore the handsome flush of a gipsy.

Then Miss Varney clutched at her lost self-control, put her handkerchief to her face, and was able to resume, almost in her own natural voice:

"I am an old fool! . . . Yes, bring the desk, Kitty, and we'll have an end of this." She sat down, laughing hysterically.

Miss Leven soon returned, bearing with her an old rose-wood desk, that looked indeed as if it might have belonged to her mother.

Slowly and deliberately, with the solemn air of one accomplishing a long-forgotten religious rite, she inserted the little silver key in the worn keyhole. It was so jagged that the key did not go in easily, and her face flushed, and her eyes filled, so that a tear betrayed her, and dropped on to the polished surface of the box. When the key had turned she raised the lid slowly, murmuring:

"I could have wished this had not happened—but what must be, must be!"

She drew out a packet of old letters, tied up with string—the outside envelope was addressed to "Miss Katherine

HIS WIDOWS

Leven" in the bold, not easily mistakable handwriting that they both knew.

"I wish you to read the first letter—the very first letter that comes, and no more!" Miss Leven begged.

"I won't read any," said Miss Varney doggedly; yet her eyes were wild with eagerness, and her restless hand went towards, and again withdrew from, the packet she coveted.

"You must, Alice! Only the first. I don't know which it happens to be. Chance it!"

She trembled, but valiantly held out the packet to her friend.

Thus adjured, Alice Varney broke the string that tied the letters of Robert Musgrave to Katherine Leven. She glanced up at the man's photograph as she did so. Miss Leven's eyes were already fixed there, and she never removed them. She was saying something under her breath. . . .

The first letter lay open on Miss Varney's knee and it began, "*My own dear love, Kitty.*"

That was all Miss Varney saw, for she fainted.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

By MARY WEBB

THE workhouse dozed in the Sunday afternoon hush. In the old women's room all was very quiet; only a single bee groped clumsily up and down the shut windows, seeking the free air, flowers, the sounding hives.

The gloomy July afternoon laid an atmosphere of disillusionment over everything. The sky was of the same sad grey as the workhouse stockings. Ninety-eight feet, clad in these stockings, were posed in various attitudes down the long room, swinging, tapping, crossed, or set out stilly side by side like those on tombs.

Forty-nine women, dressed in decent Sunday garments with white aprons, sat in rows on benches facing one another. Forty-nine souls, varied and strange and wistful, clamant for delight as the bee, were shut in here. All these life-stories, full of sad and joyous and wild happenings, had stopped here, and were only waiting for Death to break the final thread. Life was over. They were conscious of it, dumbly, uncomplainingly. They could not have been more completely sundered from their past lives if they had died and gone to Purgatory. But every heart, in this house that was not home, kept, clear and changeless, the picture of the home it had lost; garden, shippen and fold; all the small, precious, sacramental things surrounding their busy lives—things they had hardly known to be precious until they were lost. For in those homes they had been individuals, centres of warmth and love. Here they were herded in a cold, almost derisive comfort; and through the long grey

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

corridors the feet of the flame-clad, the laughter-bringer, the tear-giver—Love, were seldom heard.

They were knitting more grey stockings to wear when the others should be worn out. Their balls of wool, all exactly the same, lay beside them, and a blue-eyed kitten, passionately in love with itself, raced up and down the lines of passive feet and bullied the stout, unresisting balls.

"I'd lief be you!" said Fidelia Thatcher, who sat—tall, emaciated, white-capped—at the window end of a bench.

"That's a wicked imagination, Fidelia!"

This came from a neighbour, a stout, rosy old woman.

"Cats 'anna got souls," she added.

Fidelia raised mild eyes, and her sweet, obstinate mouth took a firmer line as she said:

"Soul or no, I'd lief be that kit-cat."

Her face, tanned golden by decades of suns and snows, had the dignity of an ancient Egyptian bas-relief. And though her long upper lip, high forehead, and arched nose were intimidating, her eyes—dark and dovelike, brooding upon the furiously energetic kitten and the anxious bee—were beautiful as the eyes of a heifer. Her large hands, twisted and swollen at the knuckles from years of work, lay quietly in the white union apron. She dreamed herself into the past. She was desperately afraid that in this place she might some day cease to believe in that past—in all the blossomy days that stretched away backwards from the day of her entrance here to her clover-scented childhood. To forget them would be like breaking faith with a lover.

One casement below and one above. What could a lone woman have wanted more? A pink rose-tree, a white rose-tree, and a lilac. These had presided over her garden. The white lupins had grown as tall as herself, and stood beside the wicket in pale dignity, like swordless angels. Her pigeons sunned themselves on the roof and paraded the tiles with soft pink feet. And, hearing the pattering

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

enthusiasm of those pink feet above her attic morning by morning, and seeing the round cheeks of the roses pressed so confidently against her window, she had almost forgotten that none would ever call her mother. Ah! Where was it now, that warm, scented peace? Where were those glad, laborious days when she scrubbed and rinsed the buttermils at the farm, returning in the evening with her perquisites of milk or pork or butter, with her small wage and her large content, and having her simple supper while dusk fell and the owls began to stir?

No conqueror of the world ever fought a harder, a grimmer battle, than Fidelia's battle against Fate—against hunger and the grey defeat that was its alternative. She had "clemmed" and she had sweated. It was over now. She sat, a shade among shades, neither in Hell nor Heaven.

She rose and let out the bee. At the sudden cessation of its note the atmosphere grew more tense and heavy.

"Theer!" she said. "Out o' prison."

"Prison? What for, 'prison'?" asked a flat-faced, meek woman. "We gets our bellyful and a bed."

"What's meat?" cried Fidelia suddenly, out of her bitterness. "What's meat, with no heart to eat it? What's sleep with naught to wake for in the morning light?"

Down the benches ran a rustle and a sigh, like the wind in old, dry-leaved trees. There were murmurs.

"That's Gospel!"

"That's the righteous truth!"

"Delia's i' the right, no danger!"

With faces turned towards her as to a prophetess, they took courage to remember the days gone by. Those days, those homes, those fields, those dear lost faces shone in their souls with the peculiar lustre that mingled love and tears give to the human memory, like the carven ivories that were painted long ago in silver and gold and rich, dim enamels, and studded with burning gems.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

"I mind," said one, "ah! I mind as if it was yesterday——"

At the magic of those words, "I mind," these pictures of the soul took shape and colour; from homely sentences and broken phrases, a sigh, a tear; so that to every eye in the room the dun-coloured walls were obliterated, glowing like painted windows, garlanded with memories, hung with the little eikons of forty-nine homes. Even the flat-faced materialist had possessed a home, and she was as jealous of its recollection as an ugly woman of a lover.

The balls of sad-coloured wool became inextricably tangled, as the exultant kitten seized her happy hour. Stockings were forgotten. Grey was forgotten. The matron was forgotten. Even the solemn festival that was to take place this very evening was forgotten.

"Cushat-doves!" murmured Fidelia in a low and dreamy voice. "I kept cushat-doves. And my gyarden most always had a flower."

"Dahlias was what our maister was set on," said a very old woman with bright blue eyes. "Ah! he liked a dahlia."

"Roses, ours fancied," put in the stout woman.

"Ah! I clem for the smell of a cabbage rose," said Fidelia.

She became mysterious, and dived into the deep pocket of her skirt.

"Look ye!" she whispered. "I couldna bide all summer without the smell of a cabbage rose. And this morning they'd left the ladder by our ward windy, being fluskered with the Bishop coming. So I crep' out and went to the matron's gyarden afore it was light and pulled this 'ere."

She held up a deep red rose amid cries of admiration and reproof.

And just as she held it up, the matron entered.

"That's the third time you've trespassed, broken bounds, and stolen," said the matron wearily. She was a kind-hearted woman, but her promotion depended on the strictness of her discipline. She was part of a machine. If it was a

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

bad machine, she had neither time nor inclination to try to alter it.

"You'll stop away from service at the chapel to-night, and you won't go to the harvest tea at the Rectory," said the matron. Fidelia's Egyptian profile was unmoved; but tears stood in her eyes. Festivals were very few, and the harvest tea was the event of the year.

There was a sound of wheels. The Bishop! He entered with the Rector and some ladies. Everyone stood up. Only the kitten remained unimpressed.

The Bishop had thought, as he saw the workhouse from a turn of the road, that it looked dreary. He had thought that it would be good to turn the eyes of these old women to the mansions of the blest. He was really kind and sympathetic, only he was not gifted with imagination, and he had never been an old, homesick, knitting woman on a bench.

So he said cheerfully, "Suppose we sing

'Jerusalem, my happy home!'

and then, in lighter vein,

'Home, sweet home!'

He intended to weave these into his speech, and only to bring in mention of the consecration of the chapel towards the end.

They sang,

"Jerusalem, my happy home!"

It was a little quavering, a little irregular, but that was put down to age.

Towards the end came an audible sound from Fidelia. Then they sang,

"Home, sweet home!"

What with the memories, and the talk, and Fidelia's sob,

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

there were a good many sniffs and surreptitious wipings of eyes.

In the last line Fidelia flung her apron over her head and wept aloud.

"Thatcher!" said the matron.

"There, there!" soothed the Bishop; and he gave her shoulder a little pat, and told her to sit down, and was sure his speech would comfort her.

But, alas! his speech did not comfort. It lacerated. It destroyed the pictures that had glowed on the wall. It hammered to pieces the little eikons of home. It built up a picture of Heaven which had in it no touch of the loved fold and cottage, but which appeared to ninety-eight alarmed eyes to be exactly like the workhouse. It was grand and large and rather pompous. It had nothing in it of firelit evenings and the bit of sewing and father winding the clock. And the more the Bishop struggled to comfort a sorrow he could not grasp, the more formal he became.

When he had finished, Fidelia emerged from her apron, and her face was that of one who has been through an agony.

So that was Heaven!

No lilac. No pink rose, nor white rose. No work. No pink feet on the tiles. Nothing but an enormous, everlasting old women's ward built of solid gold, and without even a kitten.

She looked at the Bishop and beheld him as a thief, robbing her of all hope. She had thought, without exactly formulating her thought, that Heaven would be a place with homely corners in it where the poor might dwell as of old. This man was robbing her of her dream, and it was all she had. She stood up.

"It inna true!" she cried. "It's words, words, words, a mort of words; but it inna true. And if it's true I dunno want it. It's for Squire and Rector and you. It inna for us. We'm lost our whomes; we'm gone back to school like,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

after working 'ard a many years. And if the Lord, as was but a carpenter's prentice 'isself, and the Lord's Mother, as was but a carpenter's wife, canna give poor folk a bit o' comfort in the next world, I dunna want to go there."

She sat down and retired into her apron. Every face in the lines of benches was strained forward towards the group that symbolised authority, waiting for doom to fall.

"Matron," said the Bishop, "the poor thing's overwrought."

"Not quite herself," said the Rector's wife.

"A little—queer. A little—wandering," added another lady.

"Do not punish her," said the Bishop. "The day must not be darkened."

"But she's hardly responsible, is she?" said a guardian.

The matron, trembling with distress and wrath, whispered to the Rector:

"The asylum side?"

"Yes, yes," said the Rector in what he meant to be a whisper, "the asylum side." But he was a hearty man, used to open-air sports, and his whisper was quite audible.

The visitors went away to tea at the Rectory. Service was not till seven. The old women filed out to their mugs of tea and slabs of bread and margarine. Fidelia remained where she was—a derelict. Discipline was momentarily relaxed because she did not count any more. The asylum side! The asylum side! She could not understand it. She, Fidelia Thatcher, the best butter-maker in the district, a self-respecting, self-supporting woman, had come to this. To-morrow she would be like a dumb beast driven hither and thither, under physical authority, bathed by attendants, slapped, taken for walks in a drove with imbeciles and lunatics—mad. No home on earth. No home in Heaven—if the Bishop was right.

"No!" she muttered. "It's lies, what he says." To-mor-

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

row, blackness of darkness; but she had to-night. She must think. She must efface herself to gain time.

The old women's room had a door opening into a paved, flowerless space which ought to have been a garden. Under the roof of the porch was a swallow's nest, hydra-headed with young. Fidelia loved to see the parent birds dart to and fro. She had watched them since they brought the first dabs of mud, until now when the young were ready to fly. She brought out a bench. No one ever came here in the evenings. They would go to the service and forget her. With folded hands, she sat in her corner so still that the birds were not afraid of her.

"Wings!" she murmured. "Wings!"

But there were no wings for her. Even if she desired to creep away and die by the roadside, she could not, for across the workhouse entrance was a locked gate. She watched the swallows flash across the slack clothes-line on which the grey stockings were dried, dart to the nest with that infinitesimal pause in which the food is miraculously transferred from beak to beak, and sweep away into the silent evening. And the swallows put into her mind what she would do. She fetched the yard broom, and raked down the nest.

"Fly!" she said. "Ye can!"

The four young swallows were gone into the soft, dove-coloured evening. From the chapel came the sound of the anthem.

"Blessed are the meek."

Fidelia, with the broom in her hand, looked at the broken house of clay.

"It inna true," she said to the depths of grey air. "They binna blessed. Them as is blessed is them as can fly."

With steady fingers she untied the clothes-line, and looped it over the beam of the porch. She drew forth her rose

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

and smelt it. She saw again the pink rose-tree and the white rose-tree and the lilac. She climbed on to the bench.

"This minute," she said to herself, "I be a pauper lunatic by the mercy of men. The next minute I'll make a trial of the mercy of God. Fidelia Thatcher, fly! Ye can!"

And just as the concluding strains of "Blessed are the meek" sounded harmoniously, Fidelia Thatcher stepped off the bench.

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

By STACY AUMONIER

NED PICKLEKIN was a stolid chunk of a young man, fair, blue-eyed, with his skin beaten to a uniform tint of warm red by the sun and wind. For he was the postman at the village of Ashalton. Except for two hours in the little sorting-office, he spent the whole day on his bicycle, invariably accompanied by his Irish terrier, Toffee. Toffee was as well known on the countryside as Ned himself. He took the business of delivering letters as seriously as his master. He trotted behind the bicycle with his tongue out, and waited panting outside the gates of gardens while the important government business was transacted. He never barked, and had no time for fighting common, unofficial dogs. When the letters were delivered, his master would return to his bicycle, and say: "Coom ahn, boy!" and Toffee would immediately jump up, and fall into line. They were great companions.

Ned lived with his mother, and also he walked out with a young lady. Her name was Ettie Skinner, and she was one of the three daughters of old Charlie Skinner, the corn-merchant. Charlie Skinner had a little establishment in the station-yard. He was a widower, and he and his three daughters lived in a cottage in Neap's Lane. It was very seldom necessary to deliver letters at the Skinners' cottage, but every morning Ned had to pass up Neap's Lane, and so, when he

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THIRTY-ONE STORIES

arrived at the cottage, he dismounted, and rang his bicycle bell. The signal was understood by Ettie, who immediately ran out to the gate and a conversation somewhat on this pattern usually took place:

"Hulloa!"

"Hulloa!"

"All right?"

"Ay."

"Busy?"

"Ay. Mendin' some old cla'es."

"Oo-ay!"

"Looks like mebbe a shower."

"Mebbe."

"Coomin' along to-night?"

"Ay, if it doan't rain."

"Well, so long!"

"So long, Ned."

In the evenings the conversation followed a very similar course. They waddled along the lanes side by side, and occasionally gave each other a punch. Ned smoked his pipe all the time, and Toffee was an unembarrassed cicerone. He was a little jealous of this unnecessary female, but he behaved with a resigned acquiescence. His master could do no wrong. His master was a god, a being apart from all others.

It cannot be said that Ned was a romantic lover. He was solemn, direct, imperturbable. He was a Saxon of Saxons, matter-of-fact, incorruptible, unimaginative, strong-willed, conscientious, not very ambitious, and suspicious of the unusual and the unknown. When the war broke out, he said:

"Ay, but this is a bad business!"

And then he thought about it for a month. At the end of that time he made up his mind to join. He rode up Neap's Lane one morning and rang his bell. When Ettie appeared the usual conversation underwent a slight variant:

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

"Hulloa!"

"Hulloa!"

"All right?"

"Ay."

"Doin' much?"

"Oo—mendin' pa's nightgown."

"Oh! I be goin' to jine up."

"Oo-oh! Be 'ee?"

"Ay."

"When be goin'?"

"Monday with Dick Thursby and Len Cotton. An' I think young Walters, and Binnie Short mebbe."

"Oh, I say!"

"Ay. Coomin' along to-night?"

"Ay, if it doan't rain."

"Well, see you then."

"So long, Ned."

On the following Monday Ned said good-bye to his mother, and sweetheart, and to Toffee, and he and the other four boys walked over to the recruiting-office at Carchester. They were drafted into the same unit, and sent up to Yorkshire to train. (Yorkshire being one hundred and fifty miles away was presumably the most convenient and suitable spot.)

They spent five months there, and then Len Cotton was transferred to the Machine Gun Corps, and the other four were placed in an infantry regiment and sent out to India. They did not get an opportunity of returning to Ashalton, but the night before they left Ned wrote to his mother:

"Dear Mother, I think we are off to-morrow. They don't tell us where we are going but they seem to think it's India because of the Eastern kit served out and so on. Everything all right, the grub is fine. Young Walters has gone sick with a bile on his neck. Hope you are all right. See Toffee

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

don't get into Mr. Mears yard, for this is about the time he puts down that pison for the rats. Everything O. K. love from Ned."

He wrote a very similar letter to Ettie, only leaving out the instruction about Toffee and adding, "don't get over-doing it now the warm weathers on."

They touched at Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria, and Aden. At all these places he merely sent the cryptic post-card. He did not write a letter again until he had been three weeks up in the hills in India. As a matter of fact it had been a terribly rough passage nearly all the way, especially in the Mediterranean, and nearly all the boys had been sea-sick most of the time. Ned had been specially bad and in the Red Sea had developed a slight fever. In India he had been sent to a rest-camp up in the hills. He wrote:

"Dear Mother, everything all right. The grub is fine. I went a bit sick coming out but nothing. Quite all O. K. now. This is a funny place. The people would make you laugh to look at. We beat the 2nd Royal Scots by two goals to one. I wasn't playing but Binnie played a fine game at half-back. He stopped their centre forward an old league player time and again. Hope you are keeping all right. Does Henry Thatcham take Toffee out regler. Everything serene. love from Ned."

In this letter the words "2nd Royal Scots" were deleted by the censor.

India at this time was apparently a kind of training-ground for young recruits. There were a few recalcitrant hill-tribes upon whom to practise the latest developments of military science, and Ned was mixed up in one or two of these little scraps. He proved himself a good soldier, doing precisely what he was told and being impervious to danger. They were five months in India, and then the regiment was

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

suddenly drafted back to Egypt. Big things were afoot. No one knew what was going to happen. They spent ten days in a camp near Alexandria. They were then detailed for work in connection with the protection of the banks of the Canal, and Ned was stationed near the famous pyramid of Gizeh. He wrote to his mother:

"Dear Mother,

"Everything is all right. Pretty quiet so far. This is a funny place. Young Walters has gone sick again. We had the regimental sports Thursday. Me and Bert Carter won the three-legged race. The grub is fine and we get dates and figs for nuts. Hope your cold is all right by now. Thanks for the parcel which I got on the 27th. Everything is all right. Glad to hear about Mrs. Parsons having the twins and that. Glad to hear Toffee all right and so with love.

"Your loving son Ned."

They had not been at Gizeh for more than a week before they were sent back to Alexandria and placed on a transport. In fifteen days after touching at Imbros, Ned and his companions found themselves on Gallipoli peninsula. Heavy fighting was in progress. They were rushed up to the front line. For two days and nights they were in action and their numbers were reduced to one-third their original size. For thirty hours they were without water and were being shelled by gas, harried by flame-throwers, blasted by shrapnel and high-explosive. At the end of that time they crawled back to the beach at night through prickly brambles which poisoned them and set up septic wounds if it scratched them. They lay there dormant for two days, but still under shell-fire, and then were hurriedly re-formed into a new regiment, and sent to another part of the line. This went on continuously for three weeks, and then a terrible storm and flood occurred. Hundreds of men—some alive and some partly alive—were drowned in the ravines. Ned and his company lost all their

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

kit, and slept in water for three nights running. At the end of four weeks he obtained five days' rest at the base. He wrote to Ettie:

"Dear Ettie,

"A long time since I had a letter from you. Hope all right. Everything all right so far. We had a bad storm but the weather now keeps fine. Had a fine bathe this morning. There is a man in our company would make you laugh. He is an Irish Canadian. He plays the penny whistle fine and sings a bit too. Sorry to say young Walters died. He got enteric and phewmonnia and so on. I expect his people will have heard all right. How is old Mrs. Walters? Dick Thursby got a packet too and Mrs. Quinby's boy I forget his name. How are them white rabbits of yours. I met a feller as used to take the milk round for Mr. Brand up at Bodes farm. Funny wasn't it. Well nothing more now. I hope this finds you as it leaves me your affectionate Ned."

Ned was three months on Gallipoli peninsula, but he left before the evacuation. During the whole of that time he was never not under shell-fire. He took part in seven attacks. On one occasion he went over the top with twelve hundred others, of whom only one hundred and seven returned. Once he was knocked unconscious by a mine explosion which killed sixty-seven men. At the end of that period he was shot through the back by a sniper. He was put in a dressing-station, and a gentleman in a white overall came and stuck a needle into his chest and left him there in a state of nudity for twelve hours. Work at the field hospitals was very congested just then. He became a bit delirious and was eventually put on a hospital ship with a little tag tied to him. After some vague and restless period he found himself again at Imbros and in a very comfortable hospital. He stayed there six weeks and his wound proved to be slight. The bone was only grazed. He wrote to his mother:

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

"Dear Mother,

"Everything all right. I had a scratch but nothing. I hope you enjoyed the flower show. How funny meeting Mrs. Perks. We have a fine time here. The grub is fine. Sorry to say Binnie Short went under. He got gassed one night when he hadn't his mask on. The weather is mild and pleasant. Glad to hear Henry takes Toffee out all right. Have not heard from Ettie for some time. We had a fine concert on Friday. A chap played the flute lovely. Hope you are now all right again.

"Your loving son Ned."

In bed in the hospital at Imbros a bright idea occurred to Ned. He made his will. Such an idea would never have occurred to him had it not been forced upon him by the unusual experiences of the past year. He suddenly realised that of all the boys who had left the village with him only Len Cotton, as far as he knew, remained. So one night he took a blunt-pointed pencil, and laboriously wrote on the space for the will at the end of his pay-book:

"I leave everything I've got to my mother Anne Picklekin including Toffee. I hope Henry Thatcham will continue to look after Toffee except the silver bowl which I won at the rabbit show at Oppleford. This I leave to Ettie Skinner as a memorial of me."

One day Ned enjoyed a great excitement. He was under discharge from the hospital, and a rumour got round that he and some others were to be sent back to England. They hung about the island for three days, and were then packed into an Italian fruit-steamer—which had been converted into a transport. It was very overcrowded and the weather was hot. They sailed one night and reached another island before dawn. They spent three weeks doing this. They only sailed at night, for the seas about there were reported to be infested

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

with submarines. Every morning they put in at some island in the Greek archipelago, or at some port on the mainland. At one place there was a terrible epidemic of illness, owing to some Greek gentleman having sold the men some doped wine. Fifteen of them died. Ned escaped from this, as he had not had any of the wine. He was practically a teetotaler except for an occasional glass of beer. But he was far from happy on that voyage. The seas were rough and the transport ought to have been broken up years ago, and this didn't seem to be the right route for England.

At length they reached a large port called Salonika. They never went into the town, but were sent straight out to a camp in the hills ten miles away. The country was very wild and rugged, and there was great difficulty with water. Everything was polluted and malarial. There was very little fighting apparently, but plenty of sickness. He found himself in a Scottish regiment. At least, it was called Scottish, but the men came from all parts of the world, from Bow Street to Hong-Kong.

There was to be no Blighty after all, but still—there it was! He continued to drill, and march, and clean his rifle and play the mouth-organ and football. And then one morning he received a letter from his mother, which had followed him from Imbros. It ran as follows:

“My Dear Ned,

“How are you, dear? I hope you keep all right. My corf is now pretty middlin otherwise nothin to complain of. Now dear I have to tell you something which grieves me dear. Im afraid its no good keepin it from you ony longer dear. *Ettie is walkin out with another feller.* A feller from the air station called Alf Mullet. I taxed her with it and she says yes it is so dear. Now dear you mustnt take on about this. I told her off I says it was a disgraceful and you out there fightin for your country and that. And she says

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

nothin excep yes there it was and she couldnt help it and her feelins had been changed you being away and that. Now dear you must put a good face on this and remember there's just as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it as they say dear. One of Mr. Beans rabbits died Sunday they think it over-eating you never know with rabbits. Keep your feet warm dear I hope you got them socks I sent. Lizzie was at chapel Sunday she had on her green lawn looked very nice I thought but I wish she wouldnt get them spots on her face perhaps its only the time of year. Toffee is all right he had a fight with a hairdale Thursday Henry says got one of his eres bitten but nothin serous. So now dear I must close as Mrs. Minchin wants me to go and take tea with her has Florrie has gone to the schooltreat at Furley. And so dear with love your lovin Mother."

When he had finished reading this letter he uttered an exclamation, and a cockney friend sitting on the ground by his side remarked:

"What's the matter, mate?"

Ned took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and lighted one. Then he said:

"My girl's jilted me."

The cockney laughed and said:

"Gawd! is that all? I thought it was somethin' serious!"

He was cleaning his rifle with an oil rag, and he continued:

"Don't you worry, mate. Women are like those blinkin' little Greek islands, places to call at but not to stay. What was she like?"

"Oo—all right."

"Pretty?"

"Ay—middlin'."

"'As she got another feller?"

"Ay."

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Oh, well, it's all in the gime. If you *will* go gallivanting about these foreign parts enjoyin' yerself, what d'yer expect? What time's kick-off this afternoon?"

"Two o'clock."

"Reckon we're goin' to win?"

"I doan't know. 'Pends upon whether McFarlane turns out."

"Yus, 'e's a wonderful player. Keeps the team together like."

"Ay."

"Are you playin'?"

"Ay. I'm playin' right half."

"Are yer? Well, you'll 'ave yer 'ands full. You'll 'ave to tackle Curly Snider."

"Ay."

Ned's team won the match that afternoon, and he wrote to his mother afterwards:

"Dear Mother,

"We just had a great game against 15 Royal South Hants. McFarlane played centre half and he was in great form. We lead 2—0 at half-time and they scored one at the beginnin of the second half but Davis got thro towards the end and we beat them by 3—1. I was playin quite a good game I think but McFarlane is a real first class. I got your letter all right, am glad your corf is getting all right. I was sorry about Ettie but of course she knows what she wants I spose. You dont say what Toffee did to the *other dog*. You might tell Henery to let me have a line about this. Fancy Liz being at chapel. I almos forget what shes like. Everything is all right. The grub is fine. This is a funny place all rocks and planes. The Greeks are a stinkin' lot for the most part so must now close with love.

"Ned."

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

Having completed this letter, Ned got out his paybook and revised his will. Ettie Skinner was now deleted, and the silver bowl won at the rabbit show at Oppleford was bequeathed to Henry Thatcham in consideration of his services in taking Toffee out for runs.

They spent a long and tedious eight months on the plains of Macedonia, dodging malaria and bullets, cracking vermin in their shirts, playing football, ragging, quarrelling, drilling, manœuvring and, most demoralising of all, hanging about. And then a joyous day dawned. This hybrid Scottish regiment were ordered home! They left Salonika in a French liner and ten days later arrived at Malta. But in the meantime the gods had been busy. The wireless operators had been flashing their mysterious signals all over the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. At Malta the order was countermanded. They remained there long enough to coal, but the men were not even given shore leave. The next day they turned Eastwards again and made for Alexandria.

The cockney was furious. He had the real genius of the grouser, with the added venom of the man who in the year of grace had lived by his wits and now found his wits enclosed in an iron cylinder. It was a disgusting anticlimax.

"When I left that filthy 'ole," he exclaimed, "I swore to God I'd try and never remember it again. And now I'm darned if we ain't going back there. As if once ain't enough in a man's lifetime! It's like the blooming cat with the blankety mouse!"

"Eh, well, mon," interjected a Scotsman, "there's ane thing. They canna keel ye no but once."

"It ain't the killing I mind. It's the blooming mucking about. What d'yer say, Pickles?"

"Ah, well . . . there it is," said Ned sententiously.

There was considerable "mucking about" in Egypt, and then they started off on a long trek through the desert,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

marching on wire mesh that had been laid down by the engineers. There was occasional skirmishing, sniping, fleas, delay, and general discomfort. One day, in Southern Palestine, Ned was out with a patrol party just before sun-down. They were trekking across the sand between two oases when shots rang out. Five of the party fell. The rest were exposed in the open to foes firing from concealment on two sides. The position was hopeless. They threw up their hands. Two more shots rang out and the cockney next to Ned fell forward with a bullet through his throat. Then dark figures came across the sands towards them. There were only three left, Ned, a Scotsman, and a boy who had been a clerk in a drapery store at Lewisham before the war. He said:

"Well, are they going to kill us?"

"No," said the Scotsman. "Onyway, keep your hands weel up and pray to God."

A tall man advanced, and to their relief beckoned them to follow. They fell into single file.

"These are no Tur-r-ks at all," whispered the Scotsman. "They're some nomadic Arab tribe."

The Scotsman had attended evening continuation classes at Peebles, and was rather fond of the word "nomadic."

They were led to one of the oases, and instructed to sit down. The Arabs sat round them, armed with rifles. They remained there till late at night, when another party arrived, and a rope was produced. They were handcuffed and braced together, and then by gesticulation told to march. They trailed across the sand for three hours and a half. There was no moon, but the night was tolerably clear. At length they came to another oasis, and were bidden to halt. They sat on the sand for twenty minutes, and one of the Arabs gave them some water. Then a whistle blew, and they were kicked and told to follow. The party wended its way through a grove of cedar-trees. It was pitch-dark. At last they

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

came to a halt by a large hut. There was much coming and going. When they entered the hut, in charge of their guard, they were blinded by a strong light. The hut was comfortably furnished and lighted by electric light. At a table sat a stout, pale-faced man, with a dark moustache—obviously a German. By his side stood a tall German orderly. The German official looked tired and bored. He glanced at the prisoners and drew some papers towards him.

"Come and stand here in front of my desk," he said in English.

They advanced, and he looked at each one carefully. Then he yawned, dipped his pen in ink, tried it on a sheet of paper, swore, and inserted a fresh nib.

"Now, you," he said, addressing the Scotsman, when he had completed these operations. "Name, age, profession, regiment. Smartly."

He obtained all these particulars from each man. Then he got up and came round the table, and looking right into the eyes of the clerk from Lewisham, he said:

"We know, of course, in which direction your brigade is advancing, but from which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?"

The three of them all knew this, for it was common gossip of the march. But the clerk from Lewisham said:

"I don't know."

The German turned from him to the Scotsman and repeated the question.

"I don't know," answered the Scotsman.

"From which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?" he said to Ned.

"Naw! I doan't know," replied Ned.

And then a horrible episode occurred. The German suddenly whipped out a revolver and shot the clerk from Lewisham through the body twice. He gave a faint cry and

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

crumpled forward. Without taking the slightest notice of this horror, the German turned deliberately and held the revolver pointed at Ned's face. In a perfectly unimpassioned, toneless voice he repeated:

"From which direction is the brigade commanded by Major-General Forbes Fittleworth advancing?"

In the silence which followed, the only sound seemed to be the drone of some machine, probably from the electric-light plant. The face of Ned was mildly surprised but quite impassive. He answered without a moment's hesitation:

"Naw! I doan't know."

There was a terrible moment in which the click of the revolver could almost be heard. It seemed to hover in front of his face for an unconscionable time, then suddenly the German lowered it with a curse, and leaning forward, he struck Ned on the side of his face with the flat of his hand. He treated the Scotsman in the same way, causing his nose to bleed. Both of the men remained quite impassive. Then he walked back to his seat, and said calmly:

"Unless you can refresh your memories within the next two hours you will both share the fate of—that swine. You will now go out to the plantation at the back and dig your graves. Dig three graves."

He spoke sharply in Arabic to the guards, and they were led out. They were handed a spade each, two Arabs held torches for them to work by, and four others hovered in a circle twelve paces away. The soil was light sand, and digging was fairly easy. Each man dug his own grave, making it about four feet deep. When it came to the third grave the Scotsman whispered:

"Dig deep, mon."

"Deeper than others?"

"Ay, deep enough to make a wee trench."

"I see."

They made it very deep, working together and whispering.

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

When it was practically completed, apparently a sudden quarrel arose between the men. They swore at each other, and the Scotsman sprang out of the trench and gripped Ned by the throat. A fearful struggle began to take place on the edge of the grave. The guard ran up and tried to separate them. And then, during the brief confusion, there was a sudden dramatic development. Simultaneously they snatched their spades. Both the men with the torches were knocked senseless, and one of them fell into the third grave. The torches were stamped out and a rifle went off. It was fired by a guard near the hut, and the bullet struck another Arab who was trying to use his bayonet. Ned brought a fourth man down with his spade and seized his rifle, and the Scotsman snatched the rifle of the man who had been shot, and they both leapt back into their purposely-prepared trench.

"We shallna be able to hold this long, but we'll give them a grand run for their money," said the Scotsman.

The body of one Arab was lying on the brink of their trench and the other in the trench itself. Fortunately they both had bandoliers, which Ned and his companion instantly removed.

"You face east and I'll take west," said the Scotsman, his eyes glittering in the dim light. "I'm going to try and scare that Boche devil."

He peppered away at the hut, putting bullets through every window and smashing the telephone connection, which was a fine target at the top of a post against the sky. Bullets pinged over their heads from all directions, but there was little chance of them being rushed while their ammunition held out. However, it became necessary to look ahead. It was the Scotsman's idea in digging the graves to plan them in zigzag formation. The end of the furthest one was barely ten paces from a clump of aloes. He now got busy with his spade whilst Ned kept guard in both directions,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

occasionally firing at the hut and then in the opposite direction into the darkness. In half-an-hour the Scotsman had made a shallow connection between the three graves, leaving just enough room to crawl through. They then in turn donned the turbans of the two fallen Arabs, who were otherwise dressed in a kind of semi-European uniform.

They ended up with a tremendous fusillade against the hut, riddling it with bullets; then they crept to the end of the furthest grave, and leaving their rifles, they made a sudden dash across the open space to the group of aloes, bending low and limping like wounded Arabs. They reached them in safety, but there were many open spaces to cover yet. As they emerged from the trees Ned stumbled on a dark figure. He kicked it and ran. They both ran zigzag fashion, and tore off their turbans as they raced along. They covered nearly a hundred yards, and then bullets began to search them out again. They must have gone nearly a mile before the Scotsman gave a sudden slight groan.

"I'm hit," he said.

He stumbled on into a clump of bushes, and fell down.

"Is it bad?" asked Ned.

"Eh, laddie, I'm doon," he said quietly. He put his hand to his side. He had been shot through the lungs. Ned stayed with him all night, and they were undisturbed. Just before dawn the Scotsman said:

"Eh, mon, but yon was a bonny fight," and he turned on his back and died.

Ned made a rough grave with his hands, and buried his companion. He took his identification disc and his pocket-book and small valuables, with the idea of returning them to his kin if he should get through himself. He also took his water-flask, which still fortunately contained a little water. He lay concealed all day, and at night he boldly donned his turban, issued forth and struck a caravan-trail. He continued this for four days and nights, hiding in the daytime

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

and walking at night. He lived on figs and dates, and one night he raided a village and caught a fowl, which also nearly cost him his life.

On the fourth night his water gave out, and he was becoming light-headed. He stumbled on into the darkness. He was a desperate man. All the chances were against him, and he felt unmoved and fatalistic. He drew his clasp-knife and gripped it tightly in his right hand. He was hardly conscious of what he was doing, and where he was going. The moon was up, and after some hours he suddenly beheld a small oblong hut. He got it into his head that this was the hut where his German persecutor was. He crept stealthily towards it.

"I'll kill that swine," he muttered.

He was within less than a hundred yards of the hut, when a voice called out:

"'Alt! Who goes there?"

"It's me," he said. "Doan't thee get in my way. I want to kill him. I'm going to kill him. I'm going to stab him through his black heart."

"What the hell——!"

The sentry was not called upon to use his rifle, for the turbaned figure fell forward in a swoon.

Three weeks later Ned wrote to his mother from Bethlehem (where Christ was born), and this is what he said:

"Dear Mother,

"Everything going on all right. I got three parcels here altogether as I had been away copped by some black devils an unfriendly tribe. I got back all right though. The ointment you sent was fine and so was them rock cakes. What a funny thing about Belle getting lost at the picnic. We got an awful soaking from the Mid-Lancs Fusiliers on Saturday. They had two league cracks playing one a wonderful centreforward. He scored three goals. They beat us by 7—0.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

The weather is hot but quite pleasant at night. We have an old sergeant who was born in America does wonderful tricks with string and knots and so on. He tells some very tall yarns. You have to take them with a pinch of salt. Were getting fine grub here pretty quiet so far. Hope Henry remembers to wash Toffee with that stuff every week or so. Sorry to hear Len Cotton killed. Is his sister still walking out with that feller at Aynham. I never think he was much class for her getting good money though. Hope you have not had any more trouble with the boiler. That was a good price to get for that old buck rabbit. Well there's nothing more just now and so with love your loving son,

"Ned."

Ned went through the Palestine campaign and was slightly wounded in the thigh. After spending some time in hospital he was sent to the coast and put on duty looking after Turkish prisoners. He remained there six months and was then shipped to Italy. On the way the transport was torpedoed. He was one of a party of fifty-seven picked up by French destroyers. He had been for over an hour in the water in his life-belt. He was landed in Corsica and there he developed pneumonia. He only wrote his mother one short note about this:

"Dear Mother,

"Have been a bit dicky owing to falling in the water and getting wet. But goin on all right. Nurses very nice and one of the doctors rowed for Cambridge against Oxford. I forget the year but Cambridge won by two and a half lengths. We have very nice flowers in the ward. Well not much to write about and so with love your loving son,

"Ned."

Ned was fit again in a few weeks and he was sent up to the Italian front. He took part in several engagements and

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

was transferred to the French front during the last months of the war. He was in the great retreat in March, 1918, and in the advance in July. After the armistice he was with the army of occupation on the banks of the Rhine. His mother wrote to him there:

"My Dear Ned,

"Am glad that the fightin is now all over dear. How relieved you must be. Mr. Filter was in Sunday. He thinks there will be no difficulty about you gettin your job back when you come back dear. Miss Siffkins as been deliverin but as Mr. Filter says its not likely a girl is going to be able to deliver letters not like a man can and that dear. So now you will be comin home soon dear. That will be nice. We had a pleasant afternoon at the Church needle-womens gild. Miss Barbary Banstock sang very pleesantly abide with me and the vicar told a very amusing story about a little girl and a prince she didn't know he was a prince and talked to him just as though he was a man it was very amusin dear. I hear Ettie is goin to get married next month they wont get me to the weddin was it ever so I call it disgraceful and I have said so. Maud Bean is expectin in April that makes her forth in three years. Mr. Bean as lost three more rabbits they say its rats this time. The potatoes are a poor lot this time but the runners and cabbidge promiss well. So now dear I will close. Hoppin to have you back dear soon.

"Your loving mother."

It was, however, the autumn before Ned was demobilised. One day in early October he came swinging up the village street carrying a white kit-bag slung across his left shoulder. He looked more bronzed and perhaps a little thinner, but otherwise little altered by his five years of war experiences. The village of Ashalton was quite unaltered, but he observed

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

several strange faces; he only met two acquaintances on the way to his mother's cottage, and they both said:

"Hullo, Ned! Ye're home agen then!"

In each case he replied:

"Ay," and grinned, and walked on.

He entered his mother's cottage, and she was expecting him. The lamp was lighted and a grand tea was spread. There was fresh boiled beetroot, tinned salmon, salad, cake, and a large treacle tart. She embraced him and said:

"Well, Ned! Ye're back then."

He replied, "Ay."

"Ye're lookin' fine," she said. "What a fine suit they've given ye!"

"Ay," he replied.

"I expect you want yer tea?"

"Ay."

He had dropped his kit-bag, and he moved luxuriously round the little parlour, looking at all the familiar objects. Then he sat down, and his mother brought the large brown tea-pot from the hob and they had a cosy tea. She told him all the very latest news of the village, and all the gossip of the countryside, and Ned grinned and listened. He said nothing at all. The tea had progressed to the point when Ned's mouth was full of treacle tart, when his mother suddenly stopped, and said:

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid I have somethin' distressin' to tell ye, dear."

"O-oh? what's that?"

"Poor Toffee was killed."

"What!"

Ned stopped in the mastication of the treacle tart. His eyes bulged and his cheeks became very red. He stared at his mother, and repeated:

"What's that? What's that ye say, Mother?"

"Poor Toffee, my dear. It happened right at the cross-

THE GREAT UNIMPRESSIONABLE

roads. Henry was takin' him out. It seems he ran in front of a steam-roller, and a motor came round the corner sudden. Henry called out, but too late. Went right over his back. Poor Henry was quite upset. He brought him home. What's the matter, dear?"

Ned had pushed his chair back, and he stood up. He stared at his mother like a man who has seen horror for the first time.

"Where is—where was——" he stammered.

"We buried 'im, dear, under the little mound beyond the rabbit hutches."

Ned staggered across the room like a drunken man, and repeated dismally:

"The little mound beyond the rabbit hutches!"

He lifted the latch, and groped his way into the garden. His mother followed him. He went along the mud path, past the untenanted hutches covered with tarpaulin. Some tall sunflowers stared at him insolently. A fine rain was beginning to fall. In the dim light he could just see the little mound—signifying the spot where Toffee was buried. He stood there bare-headed, gazing at the spot. His mother did not like to speak. She tiptoed back to the door. But after a time she called out:

"Ned! . . . Ned!"

He did not seem to hear, and she waited patiently. At the end of several minutes she called again:

"Ned! . . . Ned dear, come and finish your tea."

He replied quite quietly:

"All right, Mother."

But he kept his face averted, for he did not want his mother to see the tears which were streaming down his cheeks.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

By G. K. CHESTERTON

IN the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner's, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a fire-work, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily-coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many gutter-snipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates; which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against

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THE INVISIBLE MAN

that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner's shop to the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. "I want, please," he said with precision, "one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee." An instant before the girl could turn away he added, "Also, I want you to marry me."

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly and said, "Those are jokes I don't allow."

The red-haired young man lifted grey eyes of an unexpected gravity.

"Really and truly," he said, "it's as serious—as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible, like the bun. It hurts."

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.

"Don't you think," observed Angus, absently, "that it's rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married."

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop-window. They included a pyramid of highly-coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches, and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

"What on earth are you doing?" she asked.

"Duty, my dear Laura," he began.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop a minute," she cried, "and don't talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?"

"A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope."

"And what is *that*?" she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

"The wedding cake, Mrs. Angus," he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned, and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

"You don't give me any time to think," she said.

"I'm not such a fool," he answered; "that's my Christian humility."

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

"Mr. Angus," she said steadily, "before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can."

"Delighted," replied Angus gravely. "You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it."

"Oh, do hold your tongue and listen," she said. "It's nothing that I'm ashamed of, and it isn't even anything that I'm specially sorry about. But what would you say if there were something that is no business of mine and yet is my nightmare?"

"In that case," said the man seriously, "I should suggest that you bring back the cake."

"Well, you must listen to the story first," said Laura, per-

THE INVISIBLE MAN

sistently. "To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the 'Red Fish' at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar."

"I have often wondered," he said, "why there was a kind of Christian air about this one confectioner's shop."

"Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the 'Red Fish' were occasional commercial travellers, and for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you've never seen them. I mean little, loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in bar-rooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common—common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own, and were wearisomely idle and over-dressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn't exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird's; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn't be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring; making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework; or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn't know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man's name) never did anything except soak in our bar parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small, though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

"Well, I did what I've since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn't carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

"Well, I've never seen either of them from that day to this. But I've had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting."

"Ever heard of the other man?" asked Angus.

"No, he never wrote," said the girl, after an instant's

THE INVISIBLE MAN

hesitation. "Smythe's first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it, and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show, and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf, and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium, to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week."

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed, "I suppose you've seen on the hoardings all about this 'Smythe's Silent Service'? Or you must be the only person that hasn't. Oh, I don't know much about it, it's some clockwork invention for doing all the housework by machinery. You know the sort of thing: 'Press a button—A Butler who Never Drinks.' 'Turn a Handle—Ten Housemaids who Never Flirt.' You must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can't help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I'm in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he's carved his way in the world—as he certainly has."

"And the other man?" repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. "My friend," she said, "I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man's writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

could not have been, and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken."

"Well, my dear," said the young man, cheerfully, "if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?"

"I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak," said the girl, steadily. "There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it's a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival."

"Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak or anything?" asked Angus, with some interest.

Laura suddenly shuddered, and then said, with an unshaken voice, "Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success, just then, I heard Welkin say, 'He shan't have you, though.' It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful; I think I must be mad."

"If you really were mad," said the young man, "you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one—I spare you allusions to any other organs—and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window——"

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul

THE INVISIBLE MAN

by striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the new-comer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure, with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and match-boxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other's air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively. "Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?"

"On the window?" repeated the staring Angus.

"There's no time to explain other things," said the small millionaire shortly. "There's some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated."

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he had looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard and a half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters, "If you marry Smythe, he will die."

"Laura," said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, "you're not mad."

"It's the writing of that fellow Welkin," said Smythe gruffly. "I haven't seen him for years, but he's always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he's had threat-

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

ening letters left at my flat, and I can't even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flat swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop window, while the people in the shop——"

"Quite so," said Angus modestly, "while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for I swear there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he's too far off to be chased, as we don't even know the direction. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you'll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name's Flambeau, and though his youth was a bit stormy, he's a strictly honest man now, and his brains are worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead."

"That is odd," said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. "I live, myself, in Himylaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective."

"You are very good," said Angus politely. "Well, the sooner we act the better."

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of "Smythe's Silent Service," with a picture of a huge headless iron doll carrying a saucepan with the legend, "A Cook Who is Never Cross."

THE INVISIBLE MAN

"I use them in my own flat," said the little black-bearded man, laughing, "partly for advertisements, and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring you coals or claret or a timetable quicker than any live servants I've ever known, if you know which knob to press. But I'll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, too."

"Indeed?" said Angus; "is there something they can't do?"

"Yes," replied Smythe coolly; "they can't tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat."

The man's motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestice service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himylaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress. As the car swept round the crescent it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve, Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude;

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

The little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bomb shell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

"Just come in for a minute," said the breathless Smythe. "I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend." He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.

It opened on a long, commodious ante-room, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors' dummies. Like tailors' dummies they were headless; and like tailors' dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders, and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermillion, or black, for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message

THE INVISIBLE MAN

ran, "If you have been to see her to-day, I shall kill you."

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly, "Would you like a little whiskey? I rather feel as if I should."

"Thank you; I would like a little Flambeau," said Angus gloomily. "This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I'm going round at once to fetch him."

"Right you are," said the other, with admirable cheerfulness. "Bring him round here as quick as you can."

But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slid along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with syphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe's landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective, and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front hall he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstance that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a pennyworth of chestnuts, and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant's stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter, but Angus with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts," he said earnestly. "Eat up your whole stock; I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a sovereign if you'll wait here till I come back, and then tell me whether any man, woman, or child has gone into that house where the commissioner is standing."

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

"I've made a ring round that room, anyhow," he said. "They can't all four of them be Mr. Welkin's accomplices."

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himylaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau's semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plummy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

"This is my friend Father Brown," said Flambeau. "I've often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for Southerners like me."

"Yes, I think it will keep clear," said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

"No," said the priest quietly, "it has begun to snow."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening window-pane.

"Well," said Angus heavily. "I'm afraid I've come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone's throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he's perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy—a scoundrel whom

THE INVISIBLE MAN

nobody has even seen." As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura's story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man's house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost."

"Delighted," said Angus, rising also, "though he's safe enough for the present, for I've set four men to watch the only hole to his burrow."

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, "How quick the snow gets thick on the ground."

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissioner who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

"I've got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats," said the genial and gold-laced giant,

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

"and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away."

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly, "Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau's."

"Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me," said the official, with beaming authority.

"Then I wonder what that is?" said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

"God!" cried Angus involuntarily, "the Invisible Man!"

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulders; but the Scotchman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilight place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the

THE INVISIBLE MAN

middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said "Murder!" and, plunging into the flat, had explored every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. "My friend," said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, "not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man."

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms, was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe's own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him?

"Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, "Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Flambeau, "whether it belongs to this world or the other, I must go down and talk to my friend."

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, "Where is the policeman?"

"I beg your pardon," said Father Brown; "that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something—that I just thought worth investigating."

"Well, we want him back pretty soon," said Angus abruptly, "for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out."

"How?" asked the priest.

"Father," said Flambeau, after a pause, "upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I——"

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight: the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

"You're right, sir," he panted, "they've just found poor Mr. Smythe's body in the canal down below."

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. "Did he run down and drown himself?" he asked.

"He never came down, I'll swear," said the constable, "and he wasn't drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart."

"And yet you saw no one enter?" said Flambeau in a grave voice.

"Let us walk down the road a little," said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, "Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack."

"Why a light brown sack?" asked Angus, astonished.

"Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again," said Father Brown; "but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished."

THE INVISIBLE MAN

"I am pleased to hear it," said Angus with hearty irony. "It hasn't begun, so far as I am concerned."

"You must tell us all about it," said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, "Well, I'm afraid you'll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can't begin this story anywhere else.

"Have you ever noticed this—that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean—or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, 'Is anybody staying with you?' the lady doesn't answer 'Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on,' though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says, 'There is *nobody* staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, 'Who is staying in the house?' then the lady will remember the butler, parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it but they never noticed him."

"An invisible man?" inquired Angus, raising his red eyebrows.

"A mentally invisible man," said Father Brown.

A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. "Of course you can't think of such a man, until you do think of him. That's

THIRTY-ONE STORIES

where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said—things that couldn't be true. Don't get annoyed," he added, hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotchman's head; "she thought they were true. A person *can't* be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible."

"Why must there be somebody near her?" asked Angus.

"Because," said Father Brown, "barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter."

"Do you really mean to say," asked Flambeau with energy, "that Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady?"

"Yes," said the priest. "Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady. You see, he had to."

"Oh, I can't stand much more of this," exploded Flambeau. "Who is this fellow? What does he look like? What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?"

"He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold," replied the priest promptly with precision, "and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himylaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms——"

"Reverend sir," cried Angus, standing still, "are you raving mad, or am I?"

"You are not mad," said Brown, "only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example."

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand

THE INVISIBLE MAN

on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had hustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

"Nobody ever notices postmen, somehow," he said thoughtfully; "yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily."

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean, fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance, but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

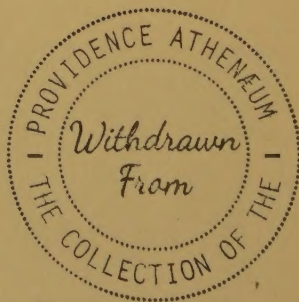
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